

Yeoman(F) Lillian Farrington Martin, Wife, Mother, and Pioneer Enlisted Woman

West Newbury's first enlisted woman, Yeoman(F) 1st Class Lillian Martin, [spent the last years of her life on Main Street](#). Lillian Mabel Farrington was born on December 5, 1884 in Boston, the middle child of Charles S. and Addie Moore Farrington, both native Mainers who had moved to Boston by the time of their marriage. Her father, a teamster, died when Martin was in her teens.

[By 1907, Martin was a working girl, a bookkeeper at a drugstore](#). At that time she roomed in Dorchester with her younger brother Perry, who was working for the Navy. On September 7, 1910, she married Hartford-born Henry Chauncey Martin, a traveling salesman in the wholesale grocery business. A little over a year later their only child, Henry Torrey Martin, was born in Waltham.

When the US entered World War I in 1917, Farrington joined the Navy reserves, one of some 12,000 women who became the [first females allowed to enlist \(as opposed to joining nurse corps\) in America's military](#). That women—who could not vote until 1920—could become yeomen(F) (for female) or more derisively yeomenettes was made possible by a dire need for clerical workers in wartime, which inspired authorities to exploit vague legislative drafting.

Enacted in preparation for America's participation in WWI, the Naval Appropriations Act of 1916 authorized and funded a Naval Auxiliary Reserve whose Naval Coast Defense Reserve Force encompassed not just men, but [“all persons who may be capable of performing special useful service for coastal defense.”](#) This loophole allowed the Navy to bypass cumbersome and inadequately funded civil service hiring to bring badly needed clerical staff (aka yeomen) on board immediately, beginning in mid-March, 1917. Haste and lack of statutory distinctions meant that the women [worked on the same terms as male yeomen](#): same pay, benefits, military regulations, performance standards. Like other sailors, the women met

physical requirements, wore uniforms, participated in military drills, and served watch duty.

Thus it mattered not that Lillian Martin was a 33-year old wife and mother of a 6-year-old: she was a qualified bookkeeper. Because naval housing for women sailors was almost nonexistent, Martin likely commuted to work from her home in Reading, as she would in a civilian job. [Over 1,000 yeomen\(F\) were assigned to the First Naval District](#), comprising Boston and the Boston Naval Shipyard (now Charlestown Navy Yard).

Within the Navy ([if not necessarily the wider public](#) at a time when the idea women in the military was viewed as ludicrous), yeomen(F) were generally appreciated as the [“girls kept the paper work under control while the men hunted the enemy.”](#) As the war ended, however, yeomen(F) were no longer essential. The Navy ceased female recruitment on November 11, 1918, and women reservists were placed on [inactive duty in July, 1919, as funding lapsed](#). Some women continued to work for the Navy in civil service positions.

When no longer needed to save the day, appreciation of the women's contributions faded. Some officers' failure to give their yeoman(F) an honorable discharge was protested and reversed on appeal. Congress gave bonus compensation to men who worked with and even were supervised by the women, [but not to yeomen\(F\)](#). Records of women yeomen like Lillian Martin are almost nonexistent. The Navy kept [no official list of yeoman\(F\)](#). One yeoman(F) wrote [The First Enlisted Women, 1917-1918](#), but the Library of Congress refused her vast collection of records. After languishing in an attic, these materials are now available at the [Naval Historical Center](#).

Martin lived with her husband in Reading for most of her life until he died in 1968. When in her 80s, she moved to West Newbury near her son and his family. [She died at age 88 on July 30, 1973 in Haverhill, where she is buried.](#)

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Source left: [Women's History Month: The Navy Yeoman in World War I \(Mar. 28, 2016\)](#) Bernice Tongate, the model for this poster, had actually enlisted in the Navy the day she posed for artist Howard Chandler Christy



Jilting the Yeomanette

By FREDERIC J. HASKIN

WASHINGTON, D. C., March 24.—The "Yeomenette" as she is called by the people and the press despite the insistence of the Navy department that she is by rights a "Yeoman female," has become one of the best-known figures in the nation. Her natty uniform, her natural pulchritude and the pictorial sections of the Sunday newspapers have worked together to that end. And now this charming, useful and picturesque creature is threatened, like the snowy ibis and the ring-tailed armadillo, with complete extinction. The United States Congress has failed to provide for her financially beyond the end of the fiscal year.

This means that several thousand young ladies now working for the United States navy and earning from \$92.50 to \$132.00 a month are puzzling their brains as to how they are going to get along with only \$12.00 a month in government pay after July 1st. At the same time the personnel division of the Navy department is wondering how it is going to manage with out the efficient services of these several thousand young ladies.

Taking advantage of the permission to enlist "reservists" to fill the places formerly held in the clerical divisions of the Navy department by men and the ruling that this term was sexless, the department started a campaign of female enlistments which called to its aid patriotic ladies from practically every state in the union. At the flood-tide of the enlistment campaign over 7000 female yeomen were used in the Washington activities of the Navy department alone, with other thousands scattered about at other stations. Bremerton, Mare Island, League Island, Annapolis, the Great Lakes Training station at Chicago, and indeed all of the naval shore stations had their quota of the natty blue-uniformed, brass buttoned and efficient young sailor-girls. They started in as "landmen-for-yeomen" doing messenger service about the buildings, but with the opportunities for advancement through the several ratings, worked up to chief yeomen, with semi-executive duties in connection with their type-writing, stenography and book-keeping. In all of these duties they steadily met the drain on man-power and released men for service with fleets of America. They "made good" so thoroughly that the personnel division of the department faces their approaching loss with something closely akin to consternation.

Already seeing their severance from the uniformed ranks of the navy approaching, many of the yeomen of skirt-wearing grades have sought other positions, but there remains over 2500 of them on duty at the Navy building here. When it is considered that the female yeomen are subject to transfer from station to station, and there often comes a call from some other shore station for one, 10, a dozen or 50 yeomen to jump in and overcome a jam of work, it is seen how important the corps has become.

And now with the naval appropriation bill which provided for their continued service, dead of an acute attack of filibustering in the U. S. Senate, the Navy department has got to put these young ladies on the inactive list, and pay them \$12.00 a month "retainer" pay until the term of their individual period of enlistment expires. What will the ladies do without the navy? What will the navy do without the ladies? These are not among the smallest of the problems of reconstruction.

Whether the passage of the naval appropriation bill at the extra session of Congress will allow the yeomen of

Source above: [The Evening Herald, Fall River, MA \(Mar. 27, 1929\)](#)

Source below: [Yeomen \(F\) Register to Vote](#)



The Yeoman (F) of Boston Navy Yard, 1918
US Naval Archives - Department of the Navy