Greg H. Williams, "a maritime historian by avocation", drew my attention when he wrote to me, last December; after he picked up a copy of Issue 2 at the Noti Post Office. He shared that he is “an author toiling in the salt mines of nonfiction reference, unseen and invisible in the glare and romance of literary fiction.” He is currently under contract to write about legal aspects of the Civil War. He also mentioned that he donated a copy of his 2002 book, Civil and Merchant Vessel Encounters with United States Navy Ships, 1800-2000, to Fern Ridge Library. That’s where I found it, available for checkout.

His book documents "incidents (among them collisions, rescue missions, groundings, foundering, intentional scuttlings, piracy, and other contacts) occurring between nearly 1,000 United States Navy ships and nearly 900 merchant vessels, yachts, workboats, and other craft during peacetime and wartime throughout the history of the Navy.” Ships are listed alphabetically, and indexes are included for both ships and people. I recommend the book. Honestly, I didn’t expect the book to be of personal interest to me; I thought of other folks who might like to know about it. However, Greg Williams became a connection for me to my parents; as I speculated about the ships my father encountered when he served in the Navy during WWII, and when the author chose to submit the following article, Women in Oregon’s World War II Shipyards.

Williams' experience with book publishing is also instructive. “It didn’t end up the way I envisioned,” he commented. “I had a soft cover book at half the price in mind, which could be sold in gift shops at maritime museums and historic ship exhibits, but McFarland [the publisher]...made an expensive, archival paper, library bound edition... McFarland specializes in worldwide library sales and they are also doing the book I’m working on now.” Seventy percent of his research comes from un-indexed sources, some he stumbled upon accidentally. His father was in the merchant marines, so Williams "grew up knowing about the subject, Liberty ships in particular." About 16 years ago, he developed a passion for searching through volumes and looking for merchant vessel names. The information naturally accumulated.

Greg H. Williams' official bio states that he "served four years in the Navy, two of them at sea, and was one of 27 volunteer crewmen who made the entire voyage from San Francisco to Europe on the SS Jeremiah O'Brien in 1994 for the 50th anniversary of the Normandy Invasion. He lives in Noti, Oregon.” Though he is published, Williams does not consider himself to be a 'professional writer', as he feels he is not one who can sell fiction in the marketplace. His reputation is for "meticulous research and finding odd stuff"; yet, in correspondence with me, he’s also a treasure trove of true stories.

I’ve enjoyed his letters, for all the interesting bits included and for information he’s provided about my family and shared about his own.

Greg was originally from Palo Alto, California, though he came to Eugene from Portland in 1975. Here, he became the first ambulance service paramedic to join a volunteer fire department (Eugene-Noti) and, in 1981, became the first volunteer medic in Lane County to provide advanced life support in a volunteer department. He used to write about patrol frigates named after small towns during WWII, and sold the articles to the towns’ newspapers. (Though Veneta had no namesake frigate, it had an aircraft observation tower and local women as spotters, he told me).

Greg Williams continues to research and write. He lives simply and pursues his curiosity, and keeps our history alive through its documentation. Look what can happen when a person follows his interests. Civil and Merchant Vessel Encounters with United States Navy Ships, 1800-2000 is available for purchase from McFarland & Co., 1-800-253-2187 or www.mcfarlandpub.com, and it can be borrowed at Fern Ridge Library (when I return it). Please enjoy his offering to Groundwaters, and join me in my appreciation of our community’s own maritime historian.