



USS *Constitution* – Significant Rebuilding/Repair/Restoration Periods

- 1801-03** USS *Constitution* at May’s Wharf, Boston for overhaul, including: new decking, select hull planking, repairs to chain & fire pumps, new yards & other spars; hove down for new copper sheathing, hull caulking & preparations for departure for Mediterranean Sea as squadron flagship
- 1804** Collision between USS *Constitution* & USS *President*, 12 September, Tripoli; extensive damage to *Constitution*’s bow area included: complete destruction of Hercules figurehead & cutwater; flying & standing jib booms & sprit sail yard carried away. Throughout the rest of September and into mid-October, *Constitution*’s bow was rebuilt, including a new billethead for decoration, re-caulking of decks, rigging and spar work, etc.
- 1812** April – June: Overhauled, Washington Navy Yard – included heaving down to clean & repair copper sheathing; new decking; new spars & rigging
- 1812 & 1813** Repairs from battles with HMS *Guerriere* (19 August 1812) & HMS *Java* (29 December 1812), included being hove down; Charlestown Navy Yard
- 1820-21** Overhauled, Charlestown Navy Yard – included repairs from battle damage with HMS *Cyane* & HMS *Levant* on 15 February 1815 and being hove down & copper sheathing replaced; prepared for departure for the Mediterranean
- 1828** Winter/spring – “a complete overhaul” at Port Mahon, according to George Jones’ 1829, *Sketches of Naval Life...from the Brandywine and Constitution Frigates*, vol. 2; 219
- 1833-35** First ever dry docking of *Constitution*, Charlestown Navy Yard – extensive hull and structural replacement work
- 1847-48** Overhauled, Charlestown Navy Yard – included longitudinal plans drawn of the ship by Samuel Pook, dated 1847 and 1849; beginning transition of USS *Constitution* from active warship to sailing training vessel for the United States Naval Academy
- 1857-60** *Constitution* hauled at the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard for completion of transition to a stationary school ship at the U.S. Naval Academy; classrooms and separate spaces set aside below for the instruction of the midshipman, including a structure over the main hatch and a poop cabin on the after part of the quarter deck; it is likely that the stern windows were changed during this re-build, from 6 original windows at the captain’s cabin to three windows and two portholes and three windows at upper transom level
- 1871-78** On-again, off-again re-build of *Constitution*, Philadelphia Navy Yard; hauled, hull planking stripped off, billet head replaced along with much bow work; ship was used as one of two transport vessels to take the U.S. exhibits to the Paris Exposition of 1878 – cargo capacity of *Constitution* had to be at its greatest for this trip; ran aground, 1879, on return trip to U.S. – dry docked in Portsmouth, England to make certain there was no permanent or structural damage
- 1906-07** “Cosmetic” work on *Constitution*, Charlestown Navy Yard; this work is considered the first true restoration of the ship as the goal was to strip away the receiving ship “house”, restore a sailing rig, correct the hull structure to her 1812 era, and create replica long guns so that *Constitution*

would exhibit an outward appearance of that of a War of 1812 vessel. The restoration work was well-intentioned, but historically inaccurate concerning the replica guns and elements of the rig; little-to-nothing below decks was restored or up-dated

- 1927-31** First significant 20th century restoration; 85% of *Constitution* was replaced while she was in Dry Dock 1, Charlestown Navy Yard; ship's plans from several 19th century eras used, thereby creating a representation of a warship that had never actually existed in the U.S. Navy; for 80 years, the vessel created from the 1927 restoration was billed as representing *Constitution* from her War of 1812 era, which was not the case
- 1936-64** USS *Constitution* was dry docked occasionally during this period for hull plank replacement, caulking, rigging work including masts and yards, etc. There is no significant work executed on the ship during this nearly 30-year period of time; in the 1960s the transition from hemp to polypropylene rigging occurred and the use of laminated white oak and Douglas fir began
- 1973-76** *Constitution* dry docked and significant below-the-waterline work was executed, including replacing the copper sheathing installed in the 1927 restoration, some framing and rigging work; beginning of research into the 1812 configuration of *Constitution's* hull
- 1992-96** *Constitution* dry docked for the 2nd most important 20th century restoration; using research into the historical record, this dry docking put forward the 5-part strengthening initiative – re-creating and installing into the ship structural elements with which she had been built, but which had long-ago been lost; replacement of spar deck; significant up-dating of the ship's rig – the oldest known model of USS *Constitution*, the 1812 “Isaac Hull” model at the Peabody Essex Museum was an important 3-D piece of historic documentation that helped to inform the up-grade to the rigging, etc.
- 21 July 1997** USS *Constitution* sailed under her own power, downwind for one hour, for the first time in 116 years, in commemoration of her 200th anniversary
- 2007-10** Water-borne restoration of *Constitution*; the upper bulwarks were lowered and the waist bulwarks were opened as per 1812 configuration – 20 tons of unnecessary upper hull structure removed, thereby relieving excess weight from 215-year-old keel; spar deck replaced; select deck beams replaced; select hull planking replaced
- 19 August 2012** USS *Constitution* sailed for ~15 minutes, downwind, in commemoration of the 200th anniversary of the War of 1812 and in particular, *Constitution's* victory over HMS *Guerriere* on 19 August 1812
- 18-19 May 2015** USS *Constitution* entered Dry Dock 1, Charlestown Navy Yard for 2 ½ - year restoration including replacement of select hull planks, the 1995 copper sheathing and below-the-waterline caulking, deck beams, etc.

Sources consulted:

1. Martin, Tyrone G. *A Most Fortunate Ship, A Narrative History of Old Ironsides*. Naval Institute Press (Annapolis, MD: 1997).
2. Martin, Tyrone G. “*Constitution's* Major Maintenance”, list compiled from Martin's essay “USS *Constitution* – Historical Maintenance & Structural Information”, as part of the USS *Constitution* Maintenance Manual, 1982.
3. Desy, Margherita M. “USS *Constitution* - Dry-dockings & Costs: 20th Century”, researched & written 2012, up-dated 2014.
4. Knox, Capt. Dudley W. *Naval Documents Related to the United States Wars with the Barbary Powers*. United States Government Printing Office (Washington, DC: 1939+), volume V.

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