



## USS Constitution's Small Boats

As early as 1798, a pinnace & yawl are mentioned as part of USS *Constitution's* small boat complement. Captain Silas Talbot, second commander of USS *Constitution*, accomplished the first “underway replenishment” of a US Navy vessel between December 31, 1799 and January 1, 1800 when he orchestrated an at-sea transfer of provisions between *Constitution* and a cargo vessel. The tons of supplies included: 260 barrels of bread, 75 barrels of beef, 75 barrels of pork, 15 barrels of Indian meal, 10 barrels of flour, 30 barrels of potatoes, 4 tierces of rice, 8 barrels of cheese, 1 tierce of peas, 1 cask peas, and 6 kegs of butter<sup>1</sup>. The replenishment took place over 28 hours, transferring the goods via *Constitution's* small boats. By the end of the cruise, Captain Talbot had been able to keep the ship on her assigned mission for 347 out of 366 days – quite a feat.

In May, 1803, as *Constitution* was being readied for her first Mediterranean sojourn in the Barbary War, the following small boats were to be constructed:

30'x7'x2.5' lapstrake barge

30'x8.5'x3' lapstrake cutter

22'x5.66'x2.25' lapstrake jolly boat<sup>2</sup>.

In July, 1804, as *Constitution* was being prepared for the bombardment of Tripoli the small boats were armed: cutter – an iron 4-pd carronade & a brass 4-pd long gun; barge – brass 4-pdr; pinnace & “small cutter” each carried brass 1 ½ pounders; and the jolly boat – an iron 4-pd carronade<sup>3</sup>.

By the War of 1812, *Constitution* was outfitted with 8 different small boats. Following are several references to the ship's boats throughout the period of the War of 1812: 1812<sup>4</sup>

July	Reference is made to 5 cutters, including a green one, and a gig ( <i>Constitution Log, National Archives &amp; Records Administration [NARA]</i> )
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<sup>1</sup> William M. Fowler, Jr., *Silas Talbot: Captain of Old Ironsides*. (Mystic, CT: Mystic Seaport Museum, 1995), 161-162.

<sup>2</sup> Letter, Edward Preble to Navy Agent Samuel Brown and letter, Sailing Master Nathaniel Haraden to Capt. Edward Preble, 7 June 1803, both letters in the Samuel Brown Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society.

<sup>3</sup> *Naval Documents Related to the United States Wars with the Barbary Powers*, Volume 4. (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1944), 289.

<sup>4</sup> The 1812 & 1813 lists are taken from the unpublished monograph, “*Constitution Close Up: Minutiae for the Modeler and Artist*”, Tyrone G. Martin, May, 2009

- Aug. 10      5<sup>th</sup> & green cutters in stern and quarter davits  
*(Constitution Log, Henry E. Huntington Library)*
- Aug. 19      Port quarter & stern boats lost in battle with HMS *Guerriere*  
*(Mdshn Frederick Baurly Journals, Massachusetts Historical Society [MHS])*
- Oct. 2        Received a new 26' cutter  
*(Navy Agent Amos Binney, Summary Statements, 1-31 Oct. 1812, RG217, 4<sup>th</sup> Auditor's Accounts, Alphabetical Series, Box 39, NARA)*
- Oct. 21      28' cutter built; 1<sup>st</sup> cutter and the gig repaired  
*(Binney, 4<sup>th</sup> Auditor's Accounts, NARA)*
- Dec. 29      Seven of eight ship's boats badly damaged in the battle with HMS *Java*  
*(Journal of Surgeon Amos A. Evans, private collection; Baurly Journals, MHS)*

1813

- Oct. 29      1 26' cutter built; 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, & 4<sup>th</sup> cutters repaired.  
*(Binney, 4<sup>th</sup> Auditor's Accounts, NARA)*

More information concerning USS *Constitution's* boats, taken from Amos Binney's Accounts<sup>5</sup>:

United States N[avy] to Barzilla [sic] Adams

1812	Oct. 17	To one whale boat for U S Ship <i>Constitution</i>	
		Commadore [sic] Wm Bainbridg [sic]	\$55.00
		5 oars --- 86 1/3 feet @ 6 1/2	5.61
		Expense for fitting for transporting	3.00
		Transporting said Boat from Fairhaven to Boston	27.00
			<hr/>
			\$90.61

Approved

Wm Bainbridge

The United States Navy Department  
for Frigate *Constitution*

	To Wm Lovering Jun	Dr	
	For two Whale Boats built by Charles Folger Jr		
	Nantucket at \$40		\$80
	M&W Coffins bill Painting ditto		15
	Two Steering Pins @ 50 c		1
	Carting ditto to Vessell [sic] &c		<hr/>
			2.91

<sup>5</sup> Taken from RG217, 4<sup>th</sup> Auditor's Settled Accounts, NARA, 'Selected Survey', by Tyrone G. Martin, copy of survey, Samuel Eliot Morison Memorial Library, USS Constitution Museum, Boston

	\$98.91	
Approved [?] of Ditto from Nantucket per Capt. R. Starbucks bill	12.	
Wm Bainbridge	\$110.91	

United States Navy Department

	To Samuel Yendell	Dr	
1812 Oct 21	To Ship <i>Constitution</i>		
	for Cutter 28 ft long at \$8 per ft		\$224
	10 Iron Knees for do. @50 cts	5.	
	1 stem plate	2.	
	Painting Cutter	<u>12.</u>	
		19	
	To repairing the Gig 6 days work for 2 men is 12 @10/20		
	6 days @ 12/12	32	
	Copper, nails & rivets	4.75	
	72 ft Boards @ 4cts	2.88	
	To repairing 1 <sup>st</sup> Cutter, 6 days' work		
	For 2 men is 12 @ 16/20		
	4 do. @ 12/	8 28	
	3 lbs Copper nails @ 75 cts	2.25	
	30 ft Oak boards @ 5 cts & 1 co. Timber 33	1.83	
	To Work on Whale boats 4 ½ days @ 2	9	
	2 Set [sic] rudder Irons for do. 2 8 ring bolts 2.50	4.50	
	8 rings @ 4 cts 32 27 Thole pins @ 25 cts. 6.75	<u>7.07</u>	
			\$335.28
	deduct over charge building Cutter		<u>19 -</u>
	Received Pay,t		\$316.28

United States Navy Department

	To Sam Yendell	Dr.	
1813	Frigate <i>Constitution</i>		
	First Cutter		
	11 Days Work for 3 Men is 33 @ 9.	49.50	
	11 do " 1 Man is 11 @ 12/	<u>22.--</u>	71.50
	Second Cutter		
	9 days Work for 3 men is 27 @ 9/	40.50	
	9 do " 1 man " 9 " 12/	<u>18.--</u>	58.50
	Fourth Cutter		
	3 days Work for 3 men is 9 " 9/	13.50	
	4 " do " 1 man " 4 " 12/	<u>8.--</u>	21.50
	Stock for the above		
	214 ft Oak boards @ 3 cts	6.42	
	165 " " do " 4 "	6.60	

10 “ “ Plank	“ 8 “	.80	
12 “ “ Timber	“ 50 “	6.00	
38 lbs Copper Nails	“ 75 “	28.54	
12 “ Sheet Copper	“ 53 “	6.36	
20 “ Nails	“ 1/	3.33	
36 Oar Cont [sic] 602 ft @ 9/		<u>75.25</u>	133.26
Pine Plank & Boards pr W <sup>m</sup> Green’s Bill			3.37

Blacksmiths Bill for the above

<u>9.51</u>
Dls 297.44

Approved

W<sup>m</sup> Bainbridge

Boston 12 July 1813

United States Frigate *Constitution*

	To John Wade	Dr
To Cutter of twenty six feet at seven dollars p <sup>r</sup> foot		182.00
“ two hundred feet of Oars at 12 ½ p <sup>r</sup> foot		<u>25.00</u>
		\$207.00

Apv<sup>d</sup> Chs Stewart

The following comment is taken from William Bainbridge’s journal concerning *Constitution*’s boats:

“After [*Java*] had struck [her flag],...hoisted out one of the only two remaining boats we had left out of 8 & sent Lieut Parker...of the *Constitution* on board to take possession of [*Java*]....The Cutter returned on board the Prize for Prisoners...<sup>6</sup>”

(Extract from Commodore William Bainbridge’s journal kept on board USS *Constitution*)

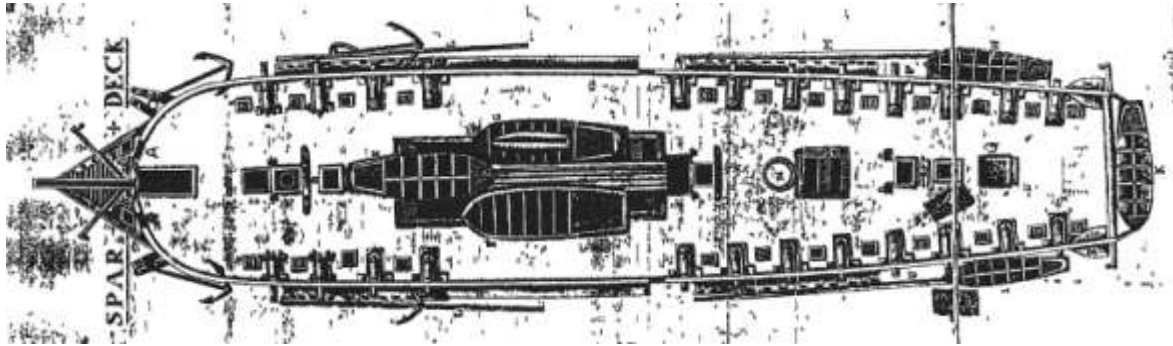
Description of launch for USS *Chesapeake* constructed by Hawkes and Babbidge, shipbuilders in Salem, MA:

“A launch has been built in this town by Hawkes & Babbidge for the *Chesapeake*. She is 32 feet long & some strakes on each side go the whole length of her. She had 50 bolts and 70 lbs. of nails, formed for 18 oars & could carry 80 men.” [November 6]

“...Mr. Babbidge gave me the description of the Launch this day sent to Boston & noticed yesterday. Her frames are of oak & excellent. She is 32 feet long,

<sup>6</sup> William S. Dudley, ed. *The Naval War of 1812, A Documentary History, Volume 1*. (Washington, DC: Naval Historical Center, Department of the Navy), 1985.

greatest length, & 9 ½ feet wide within, & about 4 ½ feet deep. Her stern is 8 feet wide. She has 8 strakes which go the whole length including bends & gunwale. All above her bends including them are of oak. The bottom is planked with spruce 1 ¼ inches thick. She has 50 bolts besides 80 rivets & above 70 lb of nails and spikes. Work shop Palfrey's, below Derby Street, W. side of Daniels Street.”<sup>7</sup> [November 7]



**[Above]**

Spar Deck portion of “Plans of the Frigate United States Decks” by Charles Ware, c.1820. Note the seven boats stored:

E [fwd main hatch] – F[first?] Cutter; F – Launch & 3<sup>rd</sup> Cutter; G – 2<sup>nd</sup> Cutter [Note: F & G may be reversed on plan – the stack of 2 boats is labeled ‘G’ on plan]

H [stbd quarter] – 4<sup>th</sup> Cutter

I [port quarter] – Gig

K [stern davits] – Jolly Boat’.

The placement of *Constitution’s* boats was likely the same as on *United States*.

**Naval History & Heritage Command Detachment Boston**  
**Up-dated April, 2012**

<sup>7</sup> William Bentley, *The Diary of William Bentley*, Volume 4, January, 1811-December, 1819, reprint. (Salem, MA: Higginson Book Company, n.d.), 129.