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. 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.

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.

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:

July 1812

Reference is made to 5 cutters, including a green one, and a gig

(Constitution Log, National Archives & Records Administration [NARA])

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1 William M. Fowler, Jr., Silas Talbot: Captain of Old Ironsides. (Mystic, CT: Mystic Seaport Museum, 1995), 161-162.
Aug. 10  
5th & 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
*(Mdshm Frederick Baury Journals, Massachusetts Historical Society [MHS]*)

Oct. 2  
Received a new 26’ cutter
*(Navy Agent Amos Binney, Summary Statements, 1-31 Oct. 1812, RG217, 4th Auditor’s Accounts, Alphabetical Series, Box 39, NARA)*

Oct. 21  
28’ cutter built; 1st cutter and the gig repaired
*(Binney, 4th 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; Baury Journals, MHS)*

1813  
Oct. 29  
1 26’ cutter built; 1st, 2nd, & 4th cutters repaired.
*(Binney, 4th Auditor’s Accounts, NARA)*

More information concerning USS Constitution’s boats, taken from Amos Binney’s Accounts:

United States Navy to Barzilla [sic] Adams

1812  
Oct. 17  
To one whale boat for U S Ship Constitution
Commodore [sic] Wm Bainbrid [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

$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 2.91

5 Taken from RG217, 4th 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

Wm Bainbridge

$110.91

United States Navy Department

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>To:</th>
<th>From:</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Quantity</th>
<th>Unit Price</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1812 Oct 21</td>
<td>To Ship Constitution</td>
<td>To Sam Yendell</td>
<td>To repairing the Gig 6 days work for 2 men is 12 @10/20 6 days @ 12/12</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>$224</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Copper, nails &amp; rivets</td>
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<td>4.75</td>
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<td>72 ft Boards @ 4cts</td>
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<td>To repairing 1st Cutter, 6 days’ work</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>For 2 men is 12 @ 16/20</td>
<td></td>
<td>28</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>4 do. @ 12/8</td>
<td></td>
<td>19</td>
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<td>3 lbs Copper nails @ 75 cts</td>
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<td>30 ft Oak boards @ 5 cts &amp; 1 co. Timber 33</td>
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<td>To Work on Whale boats 4 ½ days @ 2</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>2 Set [sic] rudder Irons for do. 2 8 ring bolts 2.50 4.50</td>
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<td>8 rings @ 4 cts 32 27 Thole pins @ 25 cts 6.75 7.07</td>
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<td>deduct over charge building Cutter</td>
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<td>19 –</td>
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<td>Received Pay,t</td>
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<td>$316.28</td>
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United States Navy Department

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<th>Frigate Constitution</th>
<th>To Sam Yendell</th>
<th>Dr.</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1813</td>
<td>First Cutter</td>
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<tr>
<td>11 Days Work for 3 Men is 33 @ 9.</td>
<td>49.50</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>11 do “ 1 Man is 11 @ 12/</td>
<td>22. --</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Second Cutter</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>9 days Work for 3 men is 27 @ 9/</td>
<td>40.50</td>
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<td>9 do “ 1 man “ 9 “ 12/</td>
<td>18. --</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fourth Cutter</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 days Work for 3 men is 9 “ 9/</td>
<td>13.50</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 “ do “ 1 man “ 4 “ 12/</td>
<td>8. --</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Stock for the above</td>
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<tr>
<td>214 ft Oak boards @ 3 cts</td>
<td>6.42</td>
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<tr>
<td>165 “ do “ 4 “</td>
<td>6.60</td>
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</table>
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/ 75.25 133.26
Pine Plank & Boards pr Wm Green’s Bill 3.37

Blacksmiths Bill for the above 9.51
Dls 297.44

Approved
Wm Bainbridge

Boston 12 July 1813

United States Frigate Constitution

To Cutter of twenty six feet at seven dollars p' foot 182.00
“ two hundred feet of Oars at 12 ½ p' foot 25.00
$207.00

Apvd 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...”

(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,

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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.” 7 [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[irst?] Cutter; F – Launch & 3rd Cutter; G – 2nd Cutter [Note: F & G may be reversed on plan – the stack of 2 boats is labeled ‘G’ on plan]
H [stbd quarter] – 4th Cutter
I [port quarter] – Gig
K [stern davits] – Jolly Boat’.

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

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