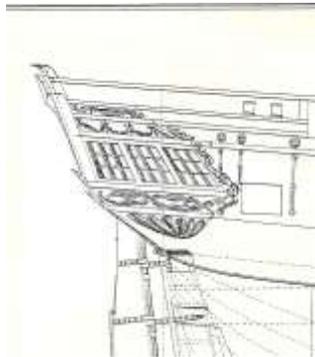




USS Constitution Stern & Quarter Gallery Decorations

- 1794** William Doughty's copy of Joshua Humphreys' plan of the 44-gun frigates includes quarter gallery decorations which included "fan" -like motif under the gallery, interlacing vine motifs, swags, and scrolls. See **Plan #14925** (below, detail).



- 1795** May 14 Joshua Humphreys to Timothy Pickering, Secretary of War:
"Sir Enclosed you have Mr. Rush's Ideas of the Heads of the Frigates.... The sterns I conceive should be all alike [on the 6 frigates], to show they belong to one family, and represented by an Eagle in the Center with the constellation around him supported on each quarter by the figures of Liberty & Justice." ¹

- 1800** Description of USS *United States*' stern decoration:
"Stern – In the center of the taff[r]ail, the figure of America, the right arm resting on the base of a monument, and three books representing the three branches of government; in the right hand a pen, to record the heroic actions of her sons; in her left, the constitution of the United States; at her feet the American fasces, erect, supported by the standards of the army and navy; on her right the figure of wisdom, and the left the figure of strength, both inclined, and looking to the centre; in the right hand of wisdom a spear, the left resting against the Port, and the

¹ Joshua Humphreys to Timothy Pickering 14 May 1795; from "Papers of the War Department: 1784-1800". Accessed 19 April 2011, <http://wardpartmentspapers.org/docimage.php?id=13952&docCollID=15227>

... bira of vigilance at her feet; the left hand of strength resting on a Herculean club; the right hand resting against the port, as the grand supporters of America. In the quarter pieces Liberty and Union, supporting the general design as the basis of a Republican government. The figure of Liberty on the starboard quarter, and Union on the larboard, both figures inclining to the centre; in the right hand of Liberty the staff and cap, in the left the rights of man; the figure of Union or concord, the right hand resting on the emblem of union, in the left the olive branch of peace.”²

c.1803 Watercolor & gouache attributed to Michele Felice Corne, shows the starboard quarter gallery with window mullions painted red and decorative “scalloping”, scrollwork, and “fan” motif picked out in white.



Detail, Corne painting; courtesy Navy Art Collection.

c. 1805 First depiction of *Constitution’s* stern decorations – painting by Michele Felice Corne, of the 1804 bombardment of Tripoli, commissioned by Commodore Edward Preble. Eight stern windows, gilded carvings that frame the arch of the transom, two upright figures on the inner side of each of the outermost windows, an indistinct central figure, and the ship’s name below the windows can all be detected.

1807-08 “Back to the United States went [USS *Constitution*] after her Mediterranean duty, and no changes [to the bow and stern carvings] have been traced until the great naval repair program began in 1807. The *Constitution* came in for her fair share and on July 18, 1808 the following bill was submitted to the Naval Agent at New York:

To Daniel N. Train Dr.

To Carving a Billet Head, with figures – quarter pieces with Bust etc. upper and lower finishings for Gallery, one pair Trusses for Stern pr [pair] Bracketts for Quarters, six pieces Quarters, six pieces of Garnishings for front of Gallery and two

² Claypoole’s *American Daily Advertiser*, Philadelphia, 14 April 1800, as quoted in ***Naval Documents Related to the Quasi-War Between the United States and France, Naval Operations***. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1935, p. 406.

Stars for Stern for U.S. Ship Constitution \$650.00

Approved. [Commo. John Rodgers Papers, Books of Navy Agent at New York]

But even these pieces were not the whole of the carved decorations for on June 16, 1808 Messrs Skillin [Simeon III] & Dodge of New York had already submitted a bill ‘U.S. Constitution To Carving two trail boards \$40.’. To this charge the Navy Agent also gave his approval.”³

W/1812

The most famous depictions of USS *Constitution*’s battle with HMS *Guerriere* were painted, at the request of Capt. Isaac Hull and under the watchful eye of Thomas Chew, *Constitution* purser and friend of Hull’s, by **Michele Felice Corne**, in late 1812. The stern of *Constitution* shows 5 windows with carvings that match the lines of the transom picked out in white, and 2 starbursts that flank the transom at the quarter galleries. A small boat hanging from the stern davits obscures the upper transom at the taffrail and any decorations that might be found there.⁴

George Ropes, a Salem, Massachusetts painter and pupil of Corne’s, also painted the *Constitution/Guerriere* battle c. 1813. Like Corne, Ropes shows 5 stern windows with red painted mullions, 2 flanking starbursts, a central eagle with spread wings, and the rest of the carvings picked out in white.⁵

Isaac Hull – a 1812 model of USS *Constitution* constructed by crew members of the ship and presented to Captain Hull, who claimed it was quite an accurate depiction. On the stern can be seen: six windows separated by pilasters, a starburst at each quarter gallery, a central figure with flag standards (likely) over a spread eagle, reclining figures flanking the central motif, one figure each reclining atop the edges of the quarter galleries, stars outline the arch of the transom, and brackets decorate the stern. The quarter galleries have ‘scalloped’ tops and ‘fans’ as supports (see Doughty’s copy of Humphreys’ 1794 plan of the 44-gun frigate and Corne’s c. 1803 watercolor of USSC).⁶

Richard Dunn – a c. 1812 model of USS *Constitution* constructed by crew members of the ship for Richard Dunn who was wounded

³ Text and interior quotations taken from: M.V. Brewington, *Shipcarvers of North America*. Barre, MA: Barre Publishing Company, 1962. Text, p. 126, endnotes #16 & 17, p. 144.

⁴ Two sets of the Corne paintings were created; one set is at the US Naval Academy Museum, Annapolis, Maryland – see *The Frigates*, Time-Life Seafarers Series; and the second set (until recently owned by the New Haven Colony Historical Society) is now owned by the Peabody Essex Museum, Salem, MA.

⁵ The George Ropes’ watercolors of *Constitution/Guerriere* can be seen in the collections of the USS Constitution Museum, Boston: www.usconstitutionmuseum.org/collections/collections/ropes_painting.htm

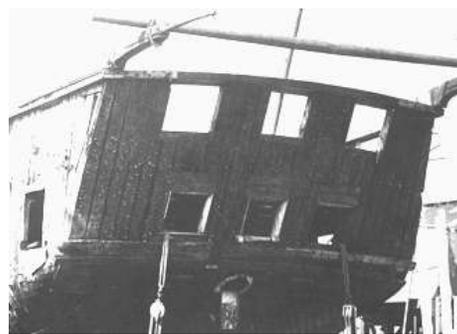
⁶ “Isaac Hull Model” of USS *Constitution* is in the collections of the Peabody Essex Museum, Salem, MA.

in the battle against HMS *Guerriere* (he had one of his legs amputated). According to family history, the hull only was made by the crew and that the model was finished and rigged by someone else at a later date. The Dunn model is very crudely finished, but it does delineate 5 stern windows and a white and gold decorative outline surround the shape of the transom.⁷

4th Auditor's Settled Accounts - "Boston Oct^r 8 - 1812 -
US Navy Department for U.S. Ship Constitution
To Raymond & Fowle Drs
To Repairing the Carved work on the Stern
Five drops for windows &c \$40 - 00..."⁸

HMS President - USS *President* was captured by HMS *Endymion* in January, 1815, and was sailed to England where she could not be repaired for service. Instead, a 'replica' was built which carried the name HMS *President*. Lines plans of this ship in the British Admiralty collection show a stern with 6 large windows, two upper transom ports, and molding outlining the shape of the stern.

Post- War of 1812 As the 19th century progressed, USS *Constitution's* stern decorations became simpler, so that by the time the ship was photographed during the 1870s re-building in Philadelphia, *Constitution* had lost 2 (or 3) stern windows at the gun deck level (see photo below); note, though, the stern port holes have either not yet been cut into the frames of the ship to admit some light and air into the 2 staterooms or the stern framing is new in this restoration and the port holes have yet to be re-installed in the transom.



Philadelphia. US Navy Photo.

c. 1873 photo, USS *Constitution*,

⁷ "Richard Dunn Model" of USS *Constitution* is in the collections of the Manchester Historical Society, Manchester, MA.

⁸ RG217, 4th Auditor's Settled Accounts - National Archives & Records Administration

1882-1897 Receiving Ship Era

USS *Constitution* last sailed in the autumn of 1881. At the conclusion of that sail, she was brought to New York where she was stripped of all valuable items and then towed to the Portsmouth Navy Yard where a “barn” was installed over her spar deck. She became a receiving ship and would remain at Portsmouth until she was returned to Boston for her centenary celebrations in 1897.



c.1897 photo, USS *Constitution* at the Portsmouth Navy Yard. Note the lack of detailed decoration on the ship's stern; portholes have replaced the 2 outboard-most windows and only molding, pilasters flanking the windows & ports, and the ship's name relieve the starkness of the large, flat ship's stern. US Navy Photo.

20th Century

USS *Constitution* underwent a ‘superficial’ restoration between 1906-07. The receiving ship “barn” was removed, the outer hull planking above the waterline was renewed, and 55 “dummy” replica guns were cast for the spar & gun decks. The stern decoration remained plain, as in the receiving ship days, with the exception that a spread eagle and six stars were added.



c.1910 photo of USS *Constitution*'s stern, after the 1906-07 restoration; note the addition of the spread eagle & 6 stars. US Navy Photo.

The massive 1927-31 re-build/restoration of USS *Constitution* included many structural and decorative changes to the ship, but the stern decorations as set in the 1906-07 restoration remained the same and would remain so throughout the 20th century.



c.1931 photo of USS *Constitution*'s stern, just before re-launching from Dry Dock #1, Charlestown Navy Yard. US Navy Photo.

21st Century

The stern of USS *Constitution* at the end of the first decade of the 21st century continues to reflect the austere mid-to-late 19th century look with the 1906 additions of the eagle and stars. It is hoped that in the ship's next restoration the stern decoration will be reconstructed as accurately as possible to the War of 1812 era, bringing back the majesty of the look of USS *Constitution*.



2012, stern of USS *Constitution*. Naval History and Heritage Command Detachment Boston Photo.