

# USS Constitution Dry Docking Background for Media

## Table of Contents

### [Background on the Importance of \*Constitution\* and Her Mission](#)

*Commander Robert Gerosa, 74<sup>th</sup> in Command, USS Constitution*

### [USS Constitution FY 2015–2017 Restoration Highlights](#)

*Naval History and Heritage Command, Detachment Boston*

### [USS Constitution—Significant Rebuilding/Repair/Restoration Periods, 1801–2017](#)

*Margherita M. Desy, Historian, Naval History and Heritage Command, Detachment Boston*

### [Copper Sheathing for USS Constitution](#)

*Naval History and Heritage Command, Detachment Boston*

### [A Brief History of USS Constitution, “America’s Ship of State”](#)

*Margherita M. Desy, Historian, Naval History and Heritage Command, Detachment Boston*

### [Vessels Captured by USS Constitution](#)

*Based on research compiled by Commander Tyrone G. Martin, (USN, Ret.), 58<sup>th</sup> in Command, USS Constitution*

### [USS Constitution Fact Sheet](#)

*Margherita M. Desy, Historian, Naval History and Heritage Command, Detachment Boston, January 2017*

### [USS Constitution Chronology](#)

*Compiled by USS Constitution Museum*

### [Naval History and Heritage Command, Detachment Boston](#)

*Margherita M. Desy, Historian, Naval History and Heritage Command, Detachment Boston*

### [The History of Boston National Historical Park’s Charlestown Navy Yard](#)

*National Parks of Boston, National Park Service*

# Background on the Importance of *Constitution* and Her Mission

*Commander Robert Gerosa, 74<sup>th</sup> in Command, USS Constitution*

*Note: On May 18, 2015, USS Constitution entered Dry Dock 1 at the Charlestown Navy Yard, Boston National Historical Park, for a 26-month restoration. The ship was undocked on July 23, 2017.*

## **The Importance of Restoring USS *Constitution***

USS *Constitution* is the only survivor of the United States Navy's original six frigates. Her mission was to keep the sea lanes open for commerce, fight pirates, land Marines in trouble spots (...to the shores of Tripoli...), and prevent the slave trade. The U.S. Navy carries out similar missions today. As in the days of sailing warships, today's Navy trains its officers and enlisted personnel to the highest standard, while incorporating the very best designs and materials into its ships. The U.S. Navy's heritage is embodied in the successes and legacies of USS *Constitution*. The principles of sovereignty and sea control are just as relevant in today's environment as they were 223 years ago, in 1794, when President George Washington signed the Naval Armament Act which authorized the building of *Constitution*.

## **The Evolution of USS *Constitution*'s Mission**

*Constitution* began her career as a front line warship for the United States and when she was built she could outgun other frigates of her class that she could not outrun. In her nearly 60 years of active service, where she went to sea armed as a man of war she attained an enviable record of 33 captures. But as happens with warships, the effects of time wore upon her, and fortunately for her alone among her peers, she found enough secondary missions to keep her afloat until the importance of preserving her as one of the U.S. Navy's first ships was realized.

Consequent to her retirement as an active warship, she spent a long period of time as a training ship for the U.S. Naval Academy where she famously evacuated the midshipmen and staff of the academy and relocated them to Newport, Rhode Island for the duration of the Civil War. After the war, *Constitution* returned to Annapolis where she was a stationary training ship for the academy. After a refit in Philadelphia in the 1870s, she sailed to France, carrying U.S. exhibits to the Paris Exposition. She last sailed in the autumn of 1881, when she carried apprentice training enlisted Sailors. Subsequently, she was sent to the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard where she was housed over with a large barn structure and turned into a receiving ship for new Navy recruits and those awaiting orders into the fleet.

In 1897, ahead of the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of her launching, she was brought back to Boston. In 1906, the first ever restoration occurred of *Constitution* bringing back a semblance of her look during her sailing battle career. It was in these early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century that she was first open to the visiting public.

*Constitution*'s primary mission has become education and public outreach as established in public law by the 83<sup>rd</sup>, 93<sup>rd</sup>, and 111<sup>th</sup> Congresses. Public law 83-523, passed on July 23, 1954, authorized the Secretary of the Navy to restore *Constitution* "as far as may be practicable" back to her original condition, but not for active service. This law cemented the requirement of the Navy to maintain the ship and identified her homeport in Boston. Public Law 93-431, passed October 1, 1974, further shaped USS *Constitution*'s mission as the Navy left Boston with the closure of the Charlestown Navy Yard. The law established that thirty acres of the Charlestown

Navy Yard be transferred to the National Park Service and thereby created the partnership currently used to maintain *Constitution*'s berth. Now the ship was no longer on a Navy installation and was much more available for public outreach in a National Park. Public Law 111-84, passed October 28, 2009, further defined the ship's role and designated *Constitution* as "America's Ship of State" due to her extraordinary history and current use in that role already. As such, she welcomes more than 500,000 guests to cross her decks annually, while her crew interacts with over a million more members of the public through local outreach efforts in the New England area and participation in the Navy Office of Community Outreach's Navy Week program across the Nation.

Today the Sailors of USS *Constitution*, in partnership with the Naval History and Heritage Command, Detachment Boston; USS *Constitution* Museum; and the National Park Service, work to preserve, protect, and promote USS *Constitution* for the people of the United States and the world as a living link to the Sailors and Marines of the past, present, and future.

### **Key Web links**

USS *Constitution*

<http://www.navy.mil/local/Constitution/>  
<https://www.facebook.com/ussconstitutionofficial>

USS *Constitution* Museum

<https://ussconstitutionmuseum.org/restoration/blog/>  
(Restoration blog)  
<https://ussconstitutionmuseum.org/>  
<https://www.facebook.com/USSConstitutionMuseum>

Charlestown Navy Yard / Boston National Historical Park

<https://www.nps.gov/bost/learn/historyculture/cny.htm>

Naval History and Heritage Command—USS *Constitution*

<https://www.history.navy.mil/browse-by-topic/ships/uss-constitution-americas-ship-of-state.html>  
<https://www.facebook.com/USNHHistory/>

U.S. Navy

<http://www.navy.mil/>

Defense Imagery & Imagery Distribution System (DVIDS)

<https://www.dvidshub.net/>

Aerial HD video, USS *Constitution*, under her own power on August 19, 2012, to commemorate the 200th anniversary of her victory over HMS *Guerriere*, which earned her nickname "Old Ironsides."

<https://www.dvidshub.net/video/152458/uss-constitution>

B-Roll USS *Constitution* crew Boarding Pike and Gun Drill

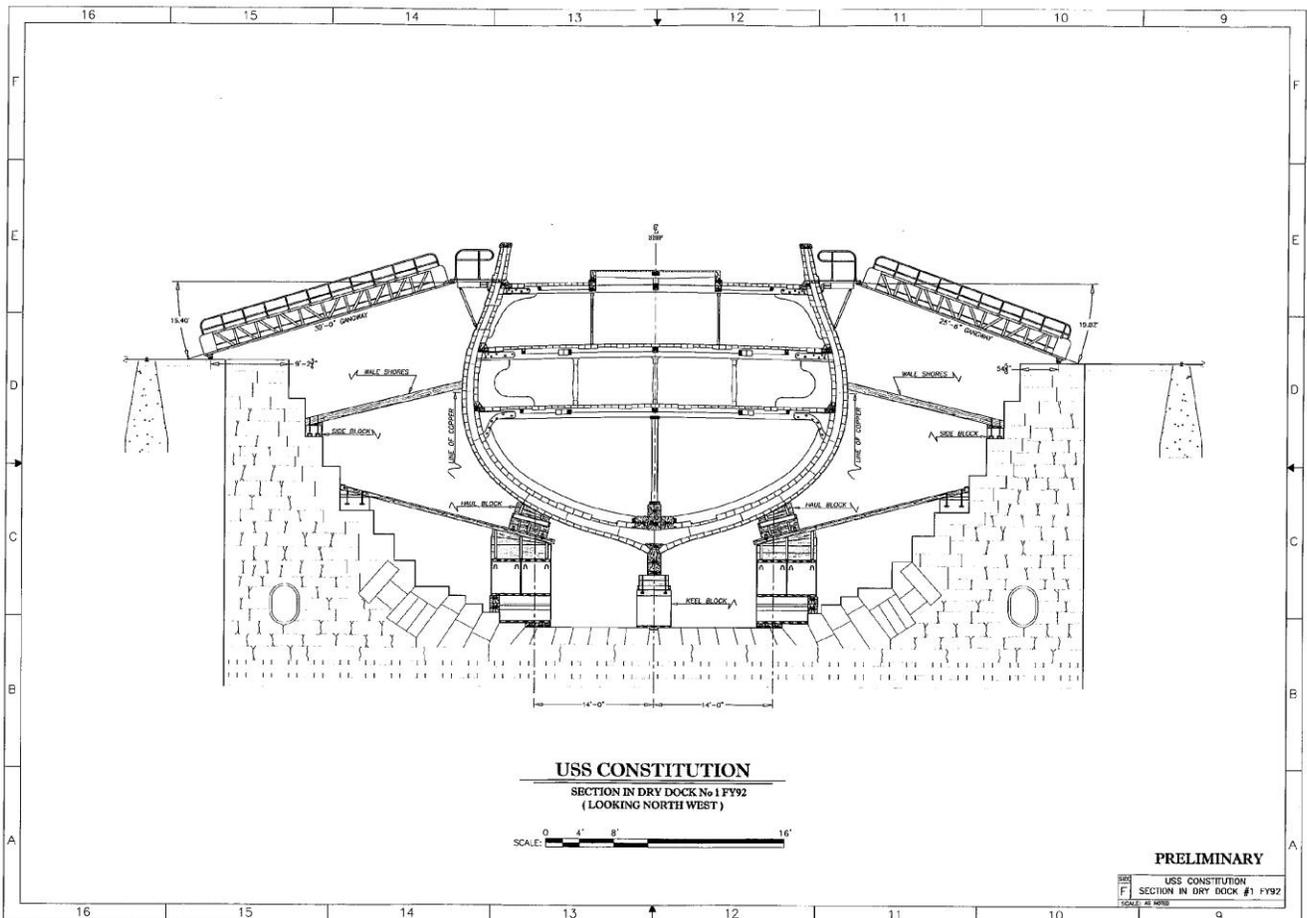
<https://www.dvidshub.net/video/148108/uss-constitution-boarding-pike-and-gun-drills-b-roll>

# USS Constitution FY 2015–2017 Restoration Highlights

Naval History and Heritage Command, Detachment Boston

The drawing provides a sense of the dry-dock setup for USS Constitution.

- Down-rig USS Constitution and prepare Dry Dock #1, Charlestown Navy Yard, Boston National Historical Park
- Dry Dock USS Constitution and install support shoring and scaffolding
- Remove copper sheathing, lower hull of Constitution
- Remove lower hull caulking
- Remove and replace hull planks
- Inspect and restore cutwater (bow of Constitution)
- Caulk hull planking
- Install new copper sheathing on lower hull
- Undock and refloat USS Constitution and re-rig



## USS *Constitution*—Significant Rebuilding/Repair/Restoration Periods, 1801–2017

*Margherita M. Desy, Historian, Naval History and Heritage Command, Detachment Boston*

- 1801–1803 USS *Constitution* at May’s Wharf, Boston, for overhaul, including new decking, select hull planking, repairs to chain and fire pumps, new yards, and other spars; hove down for new copper sheathing, hull caulking, and preparations for departure for Mediterranean Sea as squadron flagship.
- 1804 Collision between USS *Constitution* and USS *President*, September 12, Tripoli; extensive damage to *Constitution*’s bow area included: complete destruction of Hercules figurehead and cutwater; flying and standing jib booms and 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 and repair copper sheathing, new decking, new spars and rigging.
- 1812 and 1813 Repairs from battles with HMS *Guerriere* (August 19, 1812) and HMS *Java* (December 29, 1812), included being hove down, Charlestown Navy Yard.
- 1820–1821 Overhauled, Charlestown Navy Yard—included repairs from battle damage from February 15, 1815, battle with HMS *Cyane* and HMS *Levant*; hove down and 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. Fall—survey of physical condition of USS *Constitution* at the Charlestown Navy Yard in preparation for extensive rebuilding.
- 1833–1834 First ever dry docking of *Constitution*, Charlestown Navy Yard (June 24, 1833 docked)—extensive hull and structural replacement work.
- 1847–1848 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.
- 1857–1860 *Constitution* at the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard; hauled (1858), part of the transition to a stationary school ship at the U.S. Naval Academy; classrooms and separate spaces set aside below decks for the instruction of the midshipmen, 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 rebuild, from 6 original windows at the captain’s cabin to 3 windows and 2 portholes, and at the upper transom level 3 windows for the poop cabin.

- 1871–1878 On-again, off-again rebuild 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.
- 1879 January 17—While sailing from France on return trip to the United States, *Constitution* grounded off the south coast of England; January 21—Dry docked at Dock #11, Portsmouth Shipyard, England, to make certain there was no permanent or structural damage; January 24—Undocked; no visible damage from grounding. September 5—Dry docked, Brooklyn Navy Yard; September 10—Undocked, Brooklyn Navy Yard.
- 1906–1907 “Cosmetic” work on *Constitution*, Charlestown Navy Yard. Considered the first true restoration of *Constitution*, 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 project was well-intentioned but historically inaccurate concerning the replica guns and elements of the rig; little to nothing below decks was restored or updated.
- 1927–1931 First significant 20<sup>th</sup> century restoration; 85% of *Constitution* was replaced while she was in Dry Dock #1, Charlestown Navy Yard. Ship’s plans from several 19<sup>th</sup> 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.
- 1936–1964 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.
- 1973–1976 *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.
- 1992–1996 *Constitution* dry docked for the second most important 20<sup>th</sup> 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 updating 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 upgrade to the rigging, etc.
- July 21, 1997 USS *Constitution* sailed under her own power, downwind for one hour, for the first time in 116 years, in commemoration of her 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

- 2007–2010 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.
- August 19, 2012 USS *Constitution* sailed for approximately 15 minutes, downwind, in commemoration of the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the War of 1812 and *Constitution*'s victory over HMS *Guerriere* on August 19, 1812.
- May 18, 2015 USS *Constitution* entered Dry Dock #1, Charlestown Navy Yard, for 26-month restoration including replacement of 100 hull planks and the 1995 copper sheathing, caulking, replacement and refurbishment of rigging, rebuild of cutwater, and installation of new trailboards on the bow.
- July 23, 2017 USS *Constitution* undocked from Dry Dock #1, Charlestown Navy Yard.

Sources:

- Desy, Margherita M. "USS *Constitution*—Dry-dockings & Costs: 20<sup>th</sup> Century." Researched and written 2012, updated 2014.
- Knox, Dudley W. *Naval Documents Related to the United States Wars with the Barbary Powers*. Vol. V. Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1939.
- Martin, Tyrone G. *A Most Fortunate Ship: A Narrative History of Old Ironsides*. Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1997.
- 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.

## Copper Sheathing for USS *Constitution*

*Margherita M. Desy, Historian, Naval History and Heritage Command, Detachment Boston*

On March 27, 1794, Congress passed the “Act to provide a Naval Armament” which authorized President George Washington to acquire a fleet to create the new United States Navy. Joshua Humphreys, a ship designer in Philadelphia, had persuasively argued for frigates (medium-sized sailing warships) as they would be the most economical, allowing the new Navy to get the most ship for the \$600,000 allocated for creating the fleet.

Paul Revere, of “Midnight Ride” fame in the American Revolution, was a 60-year-old silversmith, merchant, and foundry man in 1794. He contracted with Henry Jackson, the Boston Naval Agent in charge of obtaining materials for the building of USS *Constitution*, to provide the copper and brass fittings for the ship “...as cheap as anyone and as well.”<sup>1</sup> Revere manufactured a 242-pound bell, the copper rudder chains, and other fittings for *Constitution*.<sup>2</sup>

Each of the six frigates was to be “copper bottomed”; that is, covered below the waterline in thousands of pieces of overlapping copper sheets. England’s Royal Navy began copper cladding its warships in 1758 and found it extended the life of the ships by preventing boring mollusks from destroying the wood. Copper sheathing also allowed for greater ease in cleaning barnacles and crustaceans from ships’ bottoms.<sup>3</sup> The new U.S. Navy was to do the same and, because rolled copper sheathing was not yet manufactured in America, Paul Revere became the “middleman” and acquired sheet copper that was manufactured in Great Britain and sold to the U.S. Navy. Enclosed with a letter dated April 21, 1794, Joshua Humphreys listed “An estimate of the quantity of Timber Plank &c for a frigate...” the size of *Constitution*, including the copper needed “12000 feet of sheet copper for bottom.”<sup>4</sup>

On July 2, 1797, just months before *Constitution* was to be launched in Boston Harbor, the Secretary of War wrote to George Claghorne, *Constitution*’s Naval Constructor, “It being of importance to the United States that the Frigate *Constitution* should be coppered on the Stocks before she is Launched into the Water – you will therefore be pleased to cause the said Ship to be coppered as high as light water mark as soon as the Bottom is prepared, as it will prevent heaving down afterwards and a Consequent heavy expense...”<sup>5</sup>

In early 1803, USS *Constitution* was readied by Commodore Edward Preble for a lengthy voyage to and deployment in the Mediterranean Sea against the North African Barbary Corsairs. The 1797 copper sheathing was worn out, and new sheathing was needed. Enter Paul Revere again and, by the 1803 re-fit of *Constitution*, he had a copper rolling mill in operation in Canton, Massachusetts, and was able to provide the thousands of sheets of copper needed for the ship.

Throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century, *Constitution*’s copper sheathing would be periodically replaced. Beginning with the 1833 docking of the ship in the Charlestown Navy Yard’s new dry dock, souvenirs were fashioned from the copper sheathing (a miniature copper kettle was made from copper removed in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century). In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the sheathing was replaced several times. In the 1927–1931 extensive restoration of *Constitution*, the final restoration report tallied the following about the copper:

*“Ship has been copper sheathed from keel to 23’ 6” aft and to a height of 21’ 0” forward - 3,400 sheets of copper, 14” x 48”, in various weights; 28-oz. between keel and shoe, 26-oz. at turn of bilge and at water line; remainder 22-oz., all of which is secured to wood planking by 1 1/8” and 1 1/4” copper sheathing nails. Approximately 12.5 tons of sheathing copper, 1600 pounds [copper] sheathing nails, 38.4 tons new copper fastening[s] used; 4 tons old copper fastening [reused?], 8 tons old copper left in ship; a total of 63.7 tons of copper now in the ship.”<sup>6</sup>*

The ship’s copper sheathing was replaced in the 1973-1974 docking and again in the 1992-1996 dry docking and restoration. The Revere Copper Company bid and supplied the 3,200 sheets installed in 1995. Twenty-two hundred sheets of the 1995 Revere Copper Company sheathing were removed and replaced in the 2015-2017 dry docking and restoration. Several different copper companies supplied the sheathing for the 2015-2017 restoration.

#### Notes

1. As quoted in: Esther Forbes, *Paul Revere & the World He Lived In* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1943), 378.
2. Edgard Moreno, “Patriotism and Profit: The Copper Mills at Canton,” in *Paul Revere – Artisan, Businessman, and Patriot: The Man Behind the Myth*, The Paul Revere Memorial Association (Boston, Massachusetts: The Paul Revere Memorial Association, 1988), 98.
3. Joshua Humphreys’ enclosure in letter, Secretary of the Treasury, Alexander Hamilton from Secretary of War, James McHenry, 21 April 1794. *Naval Documents Related to the...Barbary Powers*, Volume 1, 1785-1801 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1939), 73, 75.
4. Secretary of War, James McHenry, to George Claghorne, 27 July 1797. *Naval Documents...Barbary Wars*, Volume 1, 205.
5. Commandant, [U.S. Navy Yard], Boston, “U.S. Frigate *Constitution* (IX21) – Research Memorandum,” date stamped “Nov 27 1931,” 60. The final phrase, “...total of 63.7 tons of copper now in the ship” is ambiguous—does this weight refer to all copper in the ship’s structure, including pins, bolts, etc.? Or, did it mean only the copper sheathing and sheathing nails used below the waterline (whether new or re-used copper)?
6. Note: The 1992–1996 restoration weights provided do not include copper bolts in USS *Constitution*, therefore this is not a weight of the total amount of copper currently in the ship.

## A Brief History of USS *Constitution*, “America’s Ship of State”

*Margherita M. Desy, Historian, Naval History and Heritage Command, Detachment Boston*

At the close of the American Revolution in 1783 the new United States sent its merchant fleet afar to trade American products for goods from Europe and the Far East. After 1785, however, there was no Continental Navy, and U.S. merchant vessels sailed unprotected. The vulnerable American fleet was harassed by the British and French in the Atlantic and the Caribbean in the 1790s. At the same time, Barbary Corsairs of North Africa captured U.S. vessels and crews and held them for ransom. The U.S. Congress authorized a new navy in 1794 “in defense of commerce” and, between 1794 and 1800, the Federal Government built six frigates. USS *Constitution*, launched in Boston on October 21, 1797, from Edmund Hartt’s shipyard (site of *Constitution* Wharf, U.S. Coast Guard base), is the sole survivor of the original U.S. Navy. Joshua Humphreys, the principle designer, determined that the ships had to be the strongest, fastest, and most heavily armed frigates of the era. *Constitution*’s three-layered hull, composed of exterior and interior white oak planking over dense live oak framing (ribs) spaced close together, forms a dense and sturdy structure more than 22 inches thick at the waterline. This is the ship’s “iron” sides.

USS *Constitution*’s career began on July 22, 1798, when she sailed to the Caribbean to protect American merchant vessels that were being stopped and captured by French privateers. This first conflict to involve the U.S. Navy came to be known as the Quasi-War with France. Several captures were made by *Constitution* and her crew, but a notable event under Captain Silas Talbot’s command was the first successful attempt at “underway replenishment.” Talbot, by trans-shipping supplies from a stores ship to *Constitution* without landing in a port allowed him to keep the ship at sea 347 days out of 366—a remarkable feat for the U.S. Navy in 1799.

By 1801, the North African state of Tripoli had declared war on the United States over perceived inadequate tribute payments to Tripoli by the U.S. Government. *Constitution*, under Commodore Edward Preble, sailed to the Mediterranean Sea in 1803. In October 1803, another American warship, USS *Philadelphia*, ran aground in Tripoli Harbor and was captured, along with all her officers and Sailors. Preble determined to remove the American frigate from the Tripolitans and rescue the imprisoned American crew. In a daring night raid on February 16, 1804, Lieutenant Stephen Decatur and a hand-picked group of junior officers and Sailors snuck into Tripoli Harbor to destroy *Philadelphia*. The success of this dramatic event led to Decatur’s promotion to captain at the very young age of 25. Preble and his squadron carried out multiple bombardments on the palace at Tripoli in August and September 1804. By 1805, the conflict was drawing to a close, and on June 3 the draft peace treaty with Tripoli was signed in *Constitution*’s great cabin, thus bringing to a close the first Barbary War.

As years went on tensions flared and steadily grew between America and Great Britain. With a rallying cry of “Free Trade and Sailor’s Rights,” the United States advocated for the right of neutral trade with warring nations. At the same time, the United States rejected the British Royal Navy’s practice of forcing American Sailors to serve on its ships. *Constitution* was ready to put to sea when the United States declared war against Great Britain on June 18, 1812. Sailing in the North Atlantic on August 19, 1812, *Constitution* came upon HMS *Guerriere*, and the first

frigate-to-frigate battle of the War of 1812 took place. Thirty-five minutes after the Americans opened fire upon the British, *Guerriere* had surrendered—an unexpected victory for the fledgling U.S. Navy. In this battle *Constitution* earned the nickname “Old Ironsides” when an American Sailor, noting that some of the British cannon balls fell harmlessly off the ship’s stout oak hull, purportedly shouted, “Huzza! Her sides are made of iron!” “Old Ironsides” would repeat this victory in two more battles with the Royal Navy—a stunning War of 1812 record unequaled by any other warship in the U.S. Navy.

USS *Constitution*’s career continued for decades. In the 1820s and 1830s, she would regularly sail to the Mediterranean Sea to protect American commerce. In 1844, the aging warship began a two year around-the-world cruise that took her and her crew to over 25 foreign ports, including Mozambique, Borneo, Cochin China (Vietnam), Java, and Mexico. *Constitution* was only the ninth American warship to visit in China, showing how important the growing America-China relationship was to the United States. During the American Civil War, “Old Ironsides” was a stationary training ship for the United States Naval Academy in Annapolis, Maryland. At the outbreak of the war, the warship was removed from Annapolis and away from the threat of being captured by Confederate forces. She spent the remainder of the war in Newport, Rhode Island, where the Academy had relocated.

Periodic repair and re-building episodes in *Constitution*’s long 19<sup>th</sup> century career kept the ship sailing until 1881. Upon being finally retired by the autumn of that year, she was sent to the Portsmouth Navy Yard to be turned into a “receiving ship”: a large barn covered her upper deck and included barracks and offices for Sailors and officers. In 1897, just before “Old Ironsides” turned 100, the ship returned to Boston for a citywide celebration of her storied career. After the turn of the 20th century, *Constitution* was restored at different times, including the massive 1927–1931 restoration that saw approximately 85% of the ship completely replaced. The “National Cruise” of 1931–1934 was in thanks to the American schoolchildren who had raised \$154,000 in a “pennies campaign” toward the restoration and for the many donations of materials for the rebuilding. *Constitution* was towed by a minesweeper and visited 76 ports on the Atlantic, Gulf, and Pacific coasts, hosting over 4.6 million visitors. Since her return to Boston in 1934, the ship has left her Boston homeport only once. After the 1992–1996 restoration, during which structural strength was returned to the nearly 200-year-old warship, she was towed to Marblehead, Massachusetts, on July 20, 1997. On the following day, July 21, 1997, “Old Ironsides,” in celebration of her 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary, set sail under her own power for the first time in 116 years.

In 2009 USS *Constitution* was designated as America’s official “Ship of State”—the only ship of state in the world. The ship has now seen service in four different centuries, and “Old Ironsides” has accumulated many superlatives, including that she is the oldest commissioned warship afloat in the world and the world’s oldest vessel that can still sail under its own power.

Two hundred years ago the National Intelligencer boldly stated in its May 23, 1815, edition: “Let us keep ‘Old Iron Sides’ at home. She has . . . become a Nation’s ship, and should be preserved . . . in honorable pomp, as a glorious monument of her own, and our other naval victories . . . preserve her from decay: that our children, and children’s children, may view this

stately monument of our Naval Triumphs.... Let us preserve her as a precious model and example for future imitations of illustrious performances!”

The 2015-2017 restoration demonstrated the commitment of the U.S. Navy to preserving and promoting its heritage by sharing the history of “Old Ironsides” and the stories of the men and women who have faithfully served with distinction on the warship’s decks for 217 years. When a visitor steps foot on the deck of USS *Constitution*, he or she is making contact with the beginnings of the U.S. Navy, a navy that has kept sea lanes free for more than 200 years. USS *Constitution* is “a Nation’s ship” indeed.

## Vessels Captured by USS Constitution

Based on Research Compiled by Commander Tyrone G. Martin, (USN, Ret.) 58<sup>th</sup> in Command, USS Constitution

USS Constitution began her warship career on July 22, 1798, when she sailed to the Caribbean during the Quasi-War with France. Fifty-seven years later, her active career ended in 1855, when she returned home from having been the flagship of the African Squadron. Constitution was one of the most successful U.S. Navy warships; she captured 33 vessels during her long and distinguished career.

### 1798

September 8	<i>Niger</i> (24 guns)	British privateer
-------------	------------------------	-------------------

### 1799

January 16	<i>Spencer</i>	French prize; former British vessel
March 27	<i>Neutrality</i>	French prize; former American vessel
April 3	<i>Carteret</i>	French prize; former British packet vessel
September 15	<i>Amelia</i>	French prize; former Hamburg vessel

### 1800

February 1	<i>Swift</i>	Trafficker, American schooner
May 8	<i>Ester</i> (3 guns)	French privateer (later returned as it had been captured in a neutral port)
May 8	<i>Nymph</i>	French prize; former American vessel
May 9	<i>Sally</i>	Trafficker, American vessel
May 10	<i>Sandwich</i> (6 guns)	French letter-of-marque vessel

### 1804

September 11	_____	Blockade runner, armed Ottoman poleacre
September 11	_____	Blockade runner, armed Ottoman poleacre

### 1805

April 24	_____ (8 guns)	Privateer, Tunisian xebec
April 24	_____	Tunisian prize; former Neapolitan vessel
April 24	_____	Tunisian prize; former Neapolitan vessel

### 1810

May	<i>Golconda</i>	Trafficker, American vessel
May	<i>Rose</i>	Trafficker, American vessel

### 1812

August 10	<i>Lady Warren</i>	British brig
August 11	<i>Adiona</i>	British brig
August 15	<i>Adelina</i>	British prize; former American vessel
August 15	_____	British brig; burned
August 19	HMS <i>Guerriere</i> (38 guns)	Royal Navy frigate; former French Navy;

November 9	<i>South Carolina</i>	destroyed British-licensed American brig (capture later considered illegal)
December 29	HMS <i>Java</i> (38 guns)	Royal Navy frigate; former French Navy, <i>La Renomee</i> ; destroyed
<u>1814</u>		
February 14	<i>Lovely Ann</i>	British armed merchant ship; used as cartel
February 14	HMS <i>Pictou</i> (14 guns)	Royal Navy schooner; destroyed
February 17	<i>Phoenix</i>	British schooner; destroyed
February 19	<i>Catherine</i>	British brig; destroyed
December 24	<i>Lord Nelson</i>	British brig; destroyed
<u>1815</u>		
February 18	<i>Susanna</i>	British vessel
February 20	HMS <i>Cyane</i> (34 guns)	Royal Navy frigate
	HMS <i>Levant</i> (18 guns)	Royal Navy corvette (recaptured by the British)
<u>1853</u>		
November 3	<i>H.N. Gambrill</i>	American slave vessel

# USS *Constitution* Fact Sheet

*Margherita M. Desy, Historian, Naval History and Heritage Command, Detachment Boston  
January 2017*

USS *Constitution* was launched October 21, 1797, from Edmund Hartt's shipyard in Boston (site of present-day *Constitution* Wharf/U.S. Coast Guard base). She first sailed on July 22, 1798, as one of the six frigates that began the new United States Navy that was created "in defense of commerce." *Constitution's* final construction cost was \$302,718.84. She is remembered for capturing 33 vessels in 57 years of active service and for her three War of 1812 victories against the British Royal Navy. *Constitution's* first War of 1812 battle occurred on August 19 against HMS *Guerriere*. The defeat of *Guerriere* was the first frigate-to-frigate victory of the U.S. Navy over the Royal Navy, then the largest navy in the world. *Constitution* became "Old Ironsides" when an American Sailor noticed that some of *Guerriere's* shot failed to penetrate *Constitution's* thick oak hull. "Huzza! Her sides are made of iron!" the Sailor purportedly exclaimed, and thus the nickname was born.

USS *Constitution* became "America's Ship of State" in October 2009, is the world's oldest commissioned warship afloat, and is the oldest sailing vessel worldwide that can still sail under her own power. *Constitution* sailed for the first time in 116 years on July 21, 1997, to commemorate her 200th anniversary and again on August 19, 2012, to commemorate the 200th anniversary of the War of 1812 and her battle with HMS *Guerriere*.

## General Characteristics

USS *Constitution* is the oldest commissioned warship afloat in the world. Nicknamed "Old Ironsides" in the War of 1812, USS *Constitution* is interpreted today to the 1812 era.

**Builder:** Col. George Claghorne, Edmund Hartt's Shipyard, Boston, Massachusetts

**Launch Date:** October 21, 1797

**First Sail Date:** July 22, 1798

**Unit Cost:** \$302,719 (1797 dollars)

**1812 Propulsion:** 48 sails, over 44,000 square feet of sail, equal to over 1 acre of canvas

**Length:** length overall 305 feet (93 meters); 207 feet (63.1 meters), billet head to taffrail; 175 feet at waterline (53.3 meters)

**Height:** Main mast, from the spar (upper) deck to the top of the mast, is 172 feet (54.4 meters) today

**Beam:** 43.5 feet (13.3 meters)

**1812 Draft:** 24 feet aft, when fully loaded (7.3 meters)

**Draft Today:** 22.5 feet aft (6.9 meters)

**Displacement:** 1,900+ tons (today)

**1812 Speed:** 13+ knots (approx. 15 miles per hour, 24 km per hour)

**1812 Armament:**

—Spar Deck: 24, 32-pound carronades, 4–8 crew, range of fire approx. 400 yards; 1, 18-pound bow chaser

—Gun Deck: 30, 24-pound long guns, 7–14 crew, range of fire approx. 1,200 yards

**1812 Boats:** Used for transporting officers and crew between ship and shore for communication purposes, landing parties, transporting goods and services for the ship, and shore leave.

—36ft Launch (1)

—28ft whaleboat (2)

—27ft and 28ft cutters (4)

—Gig (1)

**1812 Crew:** Over 450 Sailors and Marines

**Crew Today:** 3 officers, 85+ enlisted U.S. Navy men and women

**Homeport:** Charlestown Navy Yard, Boston National Historical Park

**Additional resources**

[www.navy.mil/local/constitution](http://www.navy.mil/local/constitution)

[www.usconstitutionmuseum.org](http://www.usconstitutionmuseum.org)

<https://usconstitutionmuseum.org/restoration/blog/>

<https://www.nps.gov/bost/learn/historyculture/cny.htm>

# USS Constitution Chronology

*Compiled by USS Constitution Museum*

March 27, 1794	The Naval Armament act authorizes the construction of six frigates (four 44 guns, two 36 guns)
1794–1797	USS <i>Constitution</i> under construction at Edmund Hartt’s Shipyard, Boston <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• May 10, 1797, USS <i>United States</i>, 44, launched in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania</li><li>• September 7, 1797, USS <i>Constellation</i>, 36, launched in Baltimore, Maryland</li><li>• October 21, 1797 USS <i>Constitution</i>, 44, launched in Boston, Massachusetts</li><li>• August 15, 1799, USS <i>Congress</i>, 36, launched in Portsmouth, New Hampshire</li><li>• December 2, 1799, USS <i>Chesapeake</i>, 44, launched in Gosport (now Norfolk), Virginia</li><li>• April 10, 1800, USS <i>President</i>, 44, launched in New York, New York</li></ul>
July 22, 1798	Sails from Boston to Caribbean on first cruise
1798–1801	Quasi-War with France; West India Squadron flagship, 1799–1801
1801–1803	In ordinary and repair, Boston (To say that a ship was “in ordinary” meant that it was temporarily out of commission in a dry dock or harbor. When ships were placed in ordinary, crews removed their masts, rigging, sails, and guns stored them ashore. Today, a ship in a similar state is said to be “mothballed.”)
1803–1805	Barbary War, Mediterranean Squadron flagship
1805–1807	Mediterranean Squadron flagship
1807–1809	Repair in New York
1809–1810	Flagship of the “northern division of ships for the protection of the American coast.”
June 1810–1811	Northern Squadron, Captain Isaac Hull in command
August 1811–February 1812	Voyage to France, England, and Holland

1812–1815	War of 1812 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• August 19, 1812 Defeats HMS <i>Guerriere</i></li> <li>• December 29, 1812 Defeats HMS <i>Java</i></li> <li>• February 20, 1815 Defeats HMS <i>Cyane</i> and HMS <i>Levant</i></li> </ul>
1816–1821	In ordinary and repair, Boston
1821–1824	Mediterranean Squadron flagship
1824–1828	Mediterranean Squadron
1828–1831	In ordinary, Boston
1830	Harvard professor and physician Oliver Wendell Holmes, Sr. writes “Old Ironsides” poem
1833–1834	First ever dry docking of <i>Constitution</i> , Charlestown navy Yard (June 24, 1833 docked). Extensive hull and structural replacement work, including copper sheathing work.
March–June 1835	Voyage to France with Minister to France Edward Livingston
August 1835–July 1838	Mediterranean Squadron flagship
April 1839–November 1841	Pacific Squadron flagship
November 1842–February 1843	Home Squadron flagship
May 1844–September 1846	Around the World Cruise—sailed 52,370.5 miles
1846–1848	In ordinary and repair, Boston
October 1848–1851	Mediterranean Squadron
August 1, 1849	Pope Pius IX visits ship at Gaeta, Italy
1851–1853	In ordinary and repair, New York
March 1853–June 1855	African Squadron flagship <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• November 3, 1853 Captures slaver <i>H.N. Gambriel</i>, <i>Constitution</i>’s last prize</li> </ul>

June 1855–July 1857	In ordinary, Portsmouth, New Hampshire
July 1857–August 1860	Refit and converted to school ship, Portsmouth, New Hampshire
August 1860–September 1871	School ship, U.S. Naval Academy, Annapolis, Maryland, and Newport, RI (USS <i>Constitution</i> returned to Annapolis with the Naval Academy when the Civil War ended)
1871–1872	In ordinary, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
1873–January 1877	Refit, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
1877	Training ship, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
1878	Transports U.S. exhibits to Paris Exposition
1879–1881	Apprentice Training Squadron
1881–1882	In ordinary, New York
1882–1897	Receiving ship, Portsmouth, New Hampshire
September 1897	Returns to Boston for 100 <sup>th</sup> birthday
1897–1906	On exhibition, Boston
1906–1907	Restoration
1907–1926	On exhibition
1927–1931	Restoration
1931–1934	National Cruise (three-coast tour, 76 ports, over 4.6 million visitors), returns to Boston
1934–1972	On exhibition in Boston <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• August 24, 1940 Named symbolic flagship of U.S. fleet</li> <li>• 1947 150<sup>th</sup> birthday</li> <li>• 1949–1954 Repair</li> <li>• July 3, 1954 Boston designated as homeport by Congressional Act, Public Law 523</li> </ul>

1973–1976	Restoration
1976–1992	On exhibition in Boston <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• April 8, 1976 USS <i>Constitution</i> Museum opens in Navy Yard Bldg. 22</li> <li>• July 1976 Leads Tall Ships parade, Queen Elizabeth II visits for national bicentennial</li> </ul>
1992–1996	Restoration
1997	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• July 21 Sails for first time in 116 years</li> <li>• October 21 USS <i>Constitution</i>'s bicentennial</li> </ul>
1998	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• July 23–26 USS <i>Constitution</i> Bicentennial Salute (International ships salute USS <i>Constitution</i>'s extraordinary career.)</li> </ul>
2007–2010	Restoration to return ship closer to 1812 appearance
19 August 2012	USS <i>Constitution</i> sails on the 200 <sup>th</sup> anniversary of the War of 1812 and <i>Constitution</i> 's victory over HMS <i>Guerriere</i> .
2015–2017	Restoration

***The USS Constitution Museum is located in the historic Charlestown Navy Yard, across from USS Constitution and on the Freedom Trail. The USS Constitution Museum is a nonprofit, educational institution whose mission is to serve as the memory and educational voice of USS Constitution, by collecting, preserving, and interpreting the stories of "Old Ironsides" and the people associated with her.***

## Naval History and Heritage Command, Detachment Boston

*Margherita M. Desy, Historian, Naval History and Heritage Command, Detachment Boston*

The origins of the Naval History and Heritage Command, Detachment Boston can be traced to September 1897, when USS *Constitution* returned to Boston in time for the 100th anniversary of her October 21, 1797, launch. Although no one then could have predicted the ship's future, the responsibility for the long-term care of the aged warship was permanently transferred to the Boston (Charlestown) Navy Yard staff.

From the 1906–1907 restoration of the ship after her arrival in Boston through to the closure of the Charlestown Navy Yard in 1974, hundreds of shipyard workers helped to maintain, re-build, restore, and research USS *Constitution*. The closure of the Navy Yard did not interrupt the care of *Constitution*, and from 1974 to 1991 Supervisor of Shipbuilding [SUPSHIP] Boston was the supervisory department over the USS *Constitution* Maintenance and Repair Division in the Charlestown Navy Yard. Contributing to her significance, *Constitution* received two important recognitions in the mid-twentieth century. In 1954, Public Law 523 was passed—"An Act to provide for the restoration and maintenance of the United States Ship *Constitution*"—and in 1960, she became the first historic ship to be designated a National Historic Landmark by the United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service.

Since the transfer of oversight of the Detachment to the Naval Historical Center (today, the Naval History and Heritage Command [NHHC]) in 1991, the preservation and educational mission of NHHC has been embodied in the daily work of the Detachment Boston. NHHC's current [vision statement](#) is: "Enhance the warfighting effectiveness of the U.S. Navy, using the power of History and Heritage to pass on hard-won lessons, foster unit combat cohesion, and garner the continuing support of the American people." The Detachment Boston also strives to be the recognized authority on *Constitution*'s history and, through its continuing work on "Old Ironsides," instill pride in America's early naval heritage.

Approximately every 10 to 20 years the ship undergoes some element of re-building, bringing the unique skills of past and present shipwrights to the attention of *Constitution*'s visitors. Preserving *Constitution*, the oldest commissioned warship afloat in the world and helping to tell the story of the early U.S. Navy through restoration work and public outreach is the everyday work of NHHC Detachment Boston. Every year, the Detachment also responds to hundreds of inquiries, including those from high school students, national and international media, and historians writing on the early U.S. Navy. Over 500,000 international visitors walk the decks of *Constitution* annually and marvel at her physical structure; they are thrilled with the story of her battle with HMS *Guerriere* where she earned her nickname: "Huzza! Her sides are made of iron!" For over 115 years, the care, preservation, and history of *Constitution* have been in the capable hands of the staffs of the Boston Navy Yard and the Naval History and Heritage Command, Detachment Boston ship restorers and historians.

# The History of Boston National Historical Park's Charlestown Navy Yard

## *National Parks of Boston, National Park Service*

Established in 1800 as one of the six original naval shipyards in the United States, the Charlestown Navy Yard is significant for its role in constructing, repairing, and providing service to U.S. Navy vessels from the time it opened until its closing in 1974. It is also significant as the site of one of the first two naval dry docks in the United States, the location of the Navy's only ropewalk, and for technical innovations such as die-lock chain. The yard evolved throughout its history to meet changing needs and naval technologies, and the current site contains resources from all periods of its existence.

In its early years the Charlestown Navy Yard was a small supply depot, but the War of 1812 changed that when Charlestown began work on the nation's first ship-of-the-line (battleship). In the 1850s, Charlestown began constructing steam warships, and during the Civil War built *Monadnock*, an ironclad monitor. In the "New Navy" of the late 1880s and 1890s, the yard was modernized, allowing it to service the steel ships fighting in the Spanish-American War.

Ambitious shipbuilding continued through World War I, but post-war naval treaties limiting the size of the world's major navies sharply curtailed the yard's activities. The Depression took away more work, and by 1931 there were calls to close the yard. President Franklin Roosevelt's recovery programs, coupled with Japanese aggression in Asia, led to a rapidly expanding navy. For the first time Charlestown was primarily a construction yard, and it continued to build destroyers until the end of World War II. Its workforce swollen to 52,000, including a significant number of African Americans and women, the yard hummed day and night with the intensity of the war effort.

In the post-war years, Charlestown found a new role modernizing old destroyers and specialized in missile, sonar, and radar conversions. The end of the rehabilitation programs and fleet cutbacks finally brought an end to Charlestown's long and honorable history.

When the yard was closed in 1974, 30 acres were set aside to form this historic site. A walk through Charlestown Navy Yard today conveys the awesome scope of production, array of skills, and complex and interrelated operations of naval shipyards. From the sleek lines of the World War II destroyer USS *Cassin Young* (DD-793) to the immense basin of the dry dock and the elegant Commandant's House that overlooks it, the yard shows the range of activities carried out by civilian workers and naval personnel.

Charlestown Navy Yard is part of Boston National Historical Park, one of 407 parks in the National Park System. Visit [www.nps.gov](http://www.nps.gov) to learn more about parks and National Park Service programs.

***Boston National Historical Park is a unique collaboration of government owned and privately owned and operated historic sites associated with the colonial struggle for independence and the birth and growth of the United States. These nationally significant attractions include Old South Meeting House, the Old State House, Faneuil Hall, Old North Church, the Paul Revere House, the Bunker Hill Monument, the Bunker Hill Museum, Dorchester Heights Monument, and the Charlestown Navy Yard, including USS Constitution, the USS Constitution Museum, and USS Cassin Young.***

# The History of Boston National Historical Park's Dry Dock 1

*National Parks of Boston, National Park Service*

Before dry docks came into use in the late 15th century in England, the only way to service a ship's hull was to "careen" it—heave it over on its side, still floating, or laying in the mud at low tide. It was difficult and time consuming and put great strain on the hull. The answer was the dry dock. The concept is simple: float the vessel into a three-sided basin, then close the seaward end and remove all the water. The vessel settles on a cradle, its hull accessible. To undock: re-flood the basin, open the seaward end and float the vessel out.

But the concept's execution required a finely-engineered complex of masonry, engines, pumps, reservoir, tunnels, culverts, valves, and gates—in effect a huge well-coordinated machine. The Charlestown dry dock and the one built concurrently at Norfolk, Virginia, both designed by Loammi Baldwin Jr., were the first such naval structures in the United States. Six years under construction, the Charlestown dock was inaugurated in 1833 with the docking of *Constitution*. Over the course of its history Dry Dock #1 has been enlarged several times. In 1833, the dock was 341 feet; in 1858–1860 the dock was extended to 357 feet. The final extension occurred in 1947–1948, when the dock became 415 feet in overall length, the size that it is today.

It took the original eight pumps 4–5 hours to empty the tremendous basin. Other operations were to some extent governed by Boston Harbor's 10-foot tide. After the dock was enlarged, the water level did not rise as rapidly as the tide during filling, so it took two high tides to do the job. For emptying and filling, the caisson (door) was filled with water and sunk in place between grooves in the dock walls. For docking and undocking, the caisson was emptied and floated out of the way on the high tide. It took 24 men working hand pumps for an hour and a half to expel the water from the caisson.

The original 1833 wooden caisson was replaced with a riveted steel gate that was launched October 31, 1901, and placed in service in 1902. Dry Dock #1 had its third caisson installed on April 1, 2015. The new caisson, built by Steel America in Norfolk, Virginia, weighs 296 tons and was launched from its barge into Boston Harbor by "Chesapeake 1000," the largest East Coast floating crane that is capable of lifting 1,000 tons.

Charlestown Navy Yard is part of Boston National Historical Park, one of 407 parks in the National Park System. Visit [www.nps.gov](http://www.nps.gov) to learn more about parks and National Park Service programs.

*Boston National Historical Park is a unique collaboration of government owned and privately owned and operated historic sites associated with the colonial struggle for independence and the birth and growth of the United States. These nationally significant attractions include Old South Meeting House, the Old State House, Faneuil Hall, Old North Church, the Paul Revere House, the Bunker Hill Monument, the Bunker Hill Museum, Dorchester Heights Monument, and the Charlestown Navy Yard, including USS Constitution, the USS Constitution Museum, and USS Cassin Young.*