
Franklin D. Roosevelt — “The Great Communicator”
The Master Speech Files, 1898, 1910-1945

Series 1: Franklin D. Roosevelt’s Political Ascension

File No. 41

1914 December 10 - 11

New York - Society of Naval Architects

December 10-11, 1914

Speech at Society of Naval Architects &
Marine Engineers, New York City

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[Dec. 10-11, 1914]

Speediest article

After the sale of the Frigate "Alliance" in 1785 the United States ceased to have a Navy. It is, of course, well known that the present Navy of the United States had its origin in the Act of Congress of 1794 which authorized the building of six frigates. Of the causes which led to the foundation of the Navy and the actual work of ~~constructing~~ ^{constructing} our first ships little, however, is known.

first

The Navy of the United States came into being, not as a measure of defense, but as a means of affording protection to commerce. Almost immediately after the close of the Revolutionary War American merchant vessels began to suffer from the depredations of corsairs belonging to the Barbary Powers. In 1785 the schooner "Meris" of Boston and the ship "Dauphin" of Philadelphia were captured by the Algerines and their crews held for ransom. Many attempts were made by the administration to come to some agreement through diplomatic channels with Algiers and Morocco, but the negotiations dragged on and American shipping to Spain and the Mediterranean continued to be threatened by the corsairs. That the officials of our Government were seriously concerned and proceeded to consider plans to give armed protection to our shipping, is shown by an old letter-book now in the possession of the library of the Navy Department at Washington. The Navy Department did not, of course, come into existence until 1798 and this book contains the out-letters of the War Department which concern Navy affairs from 1790 until the business was turned over to the Navy Department in 1798.

The first entry, dated October 30, 1790 - nearly four years before the first ships were authorized - is a copy of a letter from Captain John Foster Williams, formerly of the Massachusetts navy in the Revolution, to the Secretary of War, sending him, agreeably to his request, an estimate of a frigate of 900 tons, thus proving that at this early date the administration of President Washington was gathering data regarding the building of ships of war. This is followed by estimates of cost of a 40-gun frigate, of ordnance stores, of the pay of officers and crew, of provisions, of sails and rigging, and of the annual expense of maintenance. The letter-book shows that in 1791 these and other estimates were submitted to a committee of the Senate.

No action seems to have been taken, however, and the depredations of the Barbary States continued until in 1793 over a dozen American ships had been captured. Late in that year Samuel Hodgdon, of Philadelphia, submitted an estimate of the cost of a frigate of from eight to twelve hundred tons. His figures show 23 16 9 per ton.

On January 2, 1794, the House of Representatives passed a resolution "That a naval force adequate to the protection of the commerce of the United States, against the Algerine corsairs, ought to be provided." A committee, of which Mr. Thomas Fitzsimons was chairman, was appointed to report. The Secretary of War sent to this committee on January 4th the estimates made in 1790 for building and equipping frigates, and also the estimate made by Samuel Hodgdon. Two weeks later the committee reported that in view of the size of the naval force of the Algerines they would recommend that four ships of 44 guns each and two ships of 24 guns each would be sufficient to protect the commerce of the United States; that the cost of this force would amount to \$600,000, and that the annual expense of maintenance would be \$247,960. The committee further proposed the levying of certain additional duties to pay for this armament. Closely following this the first bill to create a navy passed Congress and was approved on

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* but it was provided "that if a peace shall take place between the United States and the Regency of Algiers no further proceeding shall be had under the Act."

March 27th. Its preamble recognizes the considerations which induced its passage in the following words: "Whereas, the depredations committed by the Algerine Corsairs on the commerce of the United States, render it necessary that a naval force should be provided for its protection -- Be it, therefore, enacted", etc. The law provided by purchase or building for four ships to carry forty-four guns and two ships to carry thirty-six guns each. The appropriation made available was \$688,886.22. *

The War Department made immediate preparations. The letter-book shows that Joshua Humphreys, of Philadelphia, at that time the seat of the National Government, was verbally asked to make calculations of materials and prices. On April 1st, 1794, ~~the~~ John Hackett, of Salisbury, Mass., the builder of the "Alliance" of the Revolution, was asked to come to Philadelphia for the purpose of giving his advice. On April 21st the Secretary of the Treasury was notified that the President had decided that the 44-gun frigates should be built one each in Boston, New York, Philadelphia and Portsmouth, Virginia, and the 36-gun frigates one each in Baltimore and Charleston, S.C. The molds for the timbers were "preparing and nearly finished." It appears to have been the duty of the Secretary of the Treasury to take charge of the purchase of materials, ^{also} and Joshua Humphreys' estimate, giving a complete list of the varieties and sizes of timber and plank for a frigate of ~~X~~ 147' keel, 43' beam, 14' hold, 6'9" between decks and 7' ^{width} ~~width~~, was sent to the Treasury Department. It was

suggested that the live oak and red cedar be obtained from the islands of Georgia and that the vessels be constructed under the direction of agents. No decision had been reached on building by contract, though General Knox, the Secretary of War says "I should find great satisfaction in a contract if one upon solid price could be obtained." Several other estimates were made and the letter-book contains an interesting list of dimensions of over sixty French and English vessels, both warships and ~~frigates~~ ^{Indiamen}. Mr. Humphreys constructed a model of a proposed frigate of 147' keel and 42' beam and General Knox appears to have asked the opinions of several gentlemen on the sailing and fighting ~~and~~ qualities of such a ship.

On June 21st Joshua Humphreys was directed to erect a temporary building for the making of molds. On June 25th it was determined that John Morgan should be the principal constructor at Norfolk and Joshua Humphreys at Philadelphia. Henry Jackson was appointed naval agent at Boston; John Baggie, at New York, and Jeremiah Yellot at ~~Philadelphia~~ ^{Philadelphia}. Mr. Humphreys' compensation was placed at \$2,000 per annum, to date from the previous first of May "in consideration of his incessant application to the public interest in adjusting the principles of the ship, drawing up draughts and making models, *etc.*"

It was decided that the principal part of the material -- timber, iron, cordage and sail cloth would be procured in pursuance of a special arrangement through the Secretary of the Treasury. The labor and all other materials would be procured by the naval agent, who would receive a commission of 2-1/2%. The constructor would be responsible for all technical details and the execution of the work would be under a captain acting as superintendent. In addition to the previous appointments the following naval agents were chosen: William Pennock, at Norfolk, Garney and Smith, at Philadelphia, and John Langdon, for whom Jacob Sheaffe was later substituted, at Portsmouth, N.H. From the latter location it is made clear that it had been decided to build one of the 36-gun frigates at Portsmouth, N.H., instead of at Charleston, S.C., as previously suggested. Also, the six captains who had been appointed by the President were assigned as superintendents of construction as follows: John Barry, for the ship building at Philadelphia; Samuel Nicholson, at Boston; Silas Talbot, at New York; Richard Dale, at Norfolk; Thomas Truxton, at Baltimore; and James Seaver at Portsmouth, N.H. Early in August Mr. David Stodder was appointed naval constructor at Baltimore. Mr. John Morgan, who had been appointed naval constructor at Norfolk, was sent south to superintend the cutting and preparation of the timber in Georgia. The choice of George Claghorne to be naval constructor at New York, of James Hackett at Portsmouth, N.H., and of Foreman Cheeseman at Norfolk; and the appointment of Isaiah Cox as naval agent at Philadelphia,

~~the substitution of Jacob Cheaffe as naval agent at Portsmouth.~~
~~Mr. Cheaffe took the place of John Langdon~~ completed the personnel of the new work.

Meanwhile the detailed drawings and measurements were being rapidly pushed by Joshua Humphreys, while Captain Thomas Truxton was working on the spar and sail plans. The drawings were completed by Joshua Humphreys before October 1st and immediately questions arose as to the choice of certain materials. ~~Joshua~~ Humphreys appears to have advocated the use of pine beams instead of oak. In this he was supported by Captain Barry, and the Secretary of War after some hesitation decided on pitch pine beams for the 44-gun frigate to be built in Philadelphia. Captain Barry, however, journeyed to Georgia to inspect the standing live oak and as a result of this visit it was decided that oak should be used for the flooring and rising timbers of the frigates. In order to prevent all errors the molds prepared by Mr. Humphreys were shipped to Georgia and it was directed that the timber be cut in January and February, these months being recommended as the most suitable of the year for cutting timber.

In this connection it may be of interest to give extracts of the principal dimensions of the frigates, as contained in Humphreys' final ~~drafts~~ *reports*:

44-Gun Frigates

Length of gun deck from rabbet of stem to post 174' 10-1/2".
Length of keel 145'.
Molded breadth of beam in the extreme part 43' 6".
Height of wing transom above rabbet of the keel 25' 8-1/2"
Height of lower deck transom above rabbet of keel 20' 9".
Height between gun deck and lower deck 6' 4".

36-Gun Frigates

Length of gun deck from rabbet of stem to post 163' 7".
Length of keel 136'.
Molded breadth of beam in extreme part 40'.
Height of wing transom above rabbet of keel 24'.
Height of lower deck transom above rabbet of keel 19' 2".
Height between gun deck and lower deck 6'.

In both types of ship the keel to be of good sound white oak in three pieces, the middle piece to be not less than eighty feet.

In December the Secretary of War, at the request of the House of Representatives, submitted a report showing the progress made up to that time. He calls attention to the difficulties of construction in the following terms:

"That few or no materials of any sort either for construction or equipment existed in their proper shape; that everything if not to be created was to be modified; that the wood of which the frames were to be made were standing in the forests; the iron for the cannon lie in its natural bed; and the flax and hemp perhaps in their seed; that the materials will soon be collected and the building vigorously pushed, so that the frigates according to the opinions contained in the documents herewith submitted may be afloat in the course of the year 1795."

In view of the later history of our first frigates, and especially of the records of the "Constellation", "Constitution", and "United States" the following quotation from the report of Joshua Humphreys is of interest:

"As soon as Congress had agreed to build frigates, it was contemplated to make them the most powerful, and at the same time the most useful ships. After the most extensive researches and mature deliberations their dimensions were fixed and I was directed to prepare the draughts; which was accordingly done and approved. Those plans appear to be similar with those adopted

by France in their great experience in naval architecture; they having cut down several of their 74's to make heavy frigates; making them nearly of the dimensions of those for the United States. From the construction of these ships it is expected the commanders of them will have it in their power to engage or not any ship as they may think proper; and no ship under 64 now afloat but what submit to them: These reasons are paramount to all objections and annihilated opposition."

Much

States

The report of Tench Cox, Commissioner of the Revenue, that work had already begun in cutting the timber in Georgia. Also, that a contract had been executed with Messrs. Levy Hollingsworth, Son & Company, of Jersey and Pennsylvania for ninety-two tons of cannon ball and three hundred and forty tons of kentledge. Another contract with Messrs J. J. Faesch & Company, of New Jersey, for ninety-eight tons of cannon ball and two hundred and fifty-six tons of kentledge. Another contract with the Cecil Iron Company, of Maryland, for half of the 24-pound cannons. Another contract with Messrs. Brown, Francis and Company, of Providence, for one-third of the 24-pound cannons, and a contract with the Boston Company for sail cloth for all the frigates.

In January, 1795, General Knox was succeeded by Timothy Pickering as Secretary of War, but the organization ^{for} of building the frigates does not appear to have been changed in any way. In February, 1795, a quantity of copper arrived for the ships from Europe. As the work progressed numerous questions regarding materials arose, but it appears that every effort was used to build the ships in the most durable way possible. Some of the constructors desired to use

inferior materials for the deadwood, but it was ascertained that live oak could be obtained and its use was insisted on. Captain Dale, who was supervising the construction of the frigate at Norfolk applied for, and was granted, a furlough for the purpose of making a voyage to China, and his work was put in the hands of Captain Samuel Barron. ~~and~~ In the absence of ~~Mr.~~ John Morgan in Georgia Josiah Fox, Humphreys' assistant in draughting the original plans, was appointed ^{as} ~~an~~ acting constructor at Norfolk. In July, 1795, Messrs. Gurney and Smith resigned their agency for the frigate building at Philadelphia and Mr. Tench Francis was appointed naval agent.

By this time, about a year after the preliminary work had been commenced, it became apparent that the difficulties of getting the live oak in Georgia were greater than had been foreseen. Full and regular supplies for only two frigates could be kept up. To maintain the working organization on all six ships with adequate supplies would have proved unnecessarily wasteful and it was therefore decided on June 29th to suspend the work on the four ships building at Portsmouth, N.H., Boston, New York and Norfolk, continuing the building with all supplies available at Philadelphia and Baltimore. The Secretary of War says:

"Besides the saving of expense by changing the plan as now proposed, other advantages may arise. Two frigates may be completed many months before the whole if carried on together could be finished; and should there be a call for their services they might be equipped and sent to sea while the rest were progressing. Some errors may be committed in the construction of the first frigates or improvements suggested. Then in the residue the errors may be avoided and the improvements adopted."

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Timothy Pickering's report to Congress shows the progress of the work up to December 12, 1795. He states that all the live oak timber will be cut and transported to the different ships at farthest by the next mid-summer. The keel of the frigate at Philadelphia had been completed and laid on the blocks, the pieces bolted to each other; the stern frame completed and ready for raising; two-thirds of the live oak for the frame received; many of the frames put together and bolted; two-thirds of the planking received; the deck beams, live-oak knees, masts, bowsprit, yards and their spars procured; the copper sheathing received and much of the equipment, including even the bunting for the colors were already in the public stores.

The 44-gun frigate at New York had her keel completed and laid on the blocks. The pieces bolted to each other and about a quarter of the live oak timbers for the frame had arrived. The stern frame was not yet complete and several transoms were wanting; the planks for the outside of the ship were nearly all cut and a great part had been put in the sea water to draw out the sap and to season them; the spars had been received and were ready for finishing and all the necessary contracts entered into and articles daily arriving. Unfortunately a large schooner with live oak bound to New York was lost on Cape Hatteras with many of the principal pieces of timber necessary for the frame.

The keel of the 44-gun frigate building at Boston was completed

and laid on the blocks; the stern frame almost ready to raise; about two-thirds of the live oak timbers received and a great part bolted together in frames and ready to put into the ship; the planking had been received and was seasoning; the copper was in the public stores; the spars were ready for working and all contracts in a forward state.

About the same state of completion appears in the case of the 44-gun frigate building at Norfolk.

The 36-gun frigate at Baltimore had her keel laid on the blocks and bolted together. Two-thirds of the oak timber had arrived; part of it had been bolted together in frames; much of the plank and all of the copper had been received; the spars were ready for delivery; the boats building and the articles contracted for daily arriving/

The condition of the 36-gun frigate building at Portsmouth, N.H., appears in about the same state of forwardness.

Meanwhile, the Department of State had continued its negotiations with the Dey of Algiers. A treaty was entered into on the 5th of September, 1795, by which the Dey agreed not to molest American shipping in consideration of an annual payment to him by the United States and other conditions. This treaty was duly forwarded to the United States and the President at once called the attention of Congress to the fact that in accordance with the existing law no further progress could be made in building the frigates, peace with Algiers having been concluded.

In response to inquiries Congress was informed that it was estimated that \$453,272 would be necessary to complete the frigates in addition to the original appropriation of \$688,888.82. The letterbook also contains under date of January 20, 1796, a statement of the quantity of materials most essential for building the frigates for the service of the United States, the quantity of each article actually delivered into the navy yards and what ~~is~~ ^{was} deficient, and an account of the monies already expended. Congress, on April 20th, passed an act authorizing the President to continue the construction and equipment of two of the frigates of 44 guns and one of the frigates of 36 guns and appropriating for this purpose the unexpended balance of the original appropriation intended for the six frigates, and also the sum of \$80,000 which had been appropriated on June 9, 1794, for the provisional equipment of galleys, but no part of which had been expended. This action discontinued the work on the other three frigates, and it will be seen that at this early date Congress failed to recognize the needs of the country and by a half and half policy incurred in the end greater expense and less efficiency. The Secretary of War immediately issued orders stopping all operations on the ships building at New York, Portsmouth, N.H., and Norfolk and steps were taken to sell the perishable material at these places. ^{Such} ~~These~~ materials ^{as} ~~which~~ could be used in the frigates whose construction was to be continued was ordered shipped to ^{these} ~~their~~ yards and the work at Boston, Philadelphia and Baltimore was ordered expedited. By the

summer of 1796 a portion of the guns were received, ~~by~~ approved and accepted.

It appears also that the action of Congress in discontinuing the work on three of the frigates cut off at the same time the pay of Captains Dale, Seaver and Talbot; of Naval Constructors Fox, Cheeseman and Hackett, and of Naval Agents Blagge, Pennock and ~~Sheple~~^{Shaple}. The officers at these places were directed to make suitable provision for the proper storing of such timber and materials as were not perishable and for the protection of the keels and frames of the three ships. Naval Constructor Fox was directed to visit the yards at New York and Portsmouth, N.H., to inventory the materials and inspect the arrangements which had been made for the proper preservation of the work already done.

The letterbook, in August 1796, contains the first mention of the building of a frigate "for the Mediterranean service." Proposals were asked for a 36-gun frigate and Mr. ^{Jamies}~~John~~ Hackett, of Portsmouth, N.H., appears to have been the lowest bidder. He was accordingly awarded the contract on condition that the vessel be delivered complete in ten months; that the Government would furnish the timber, plank, etc., which it had in store, at a valuation, and that the United States should appoint an inspector of the work. This frigate was, under the agreement with the Dey of Algiers, destined ~~as a present~~ as a part of the price which the United States agreed to pay to insure the safety of our commerce. The Secretary of the Treasury estimated the whole expense of fulfilling the treaty at \$992,463.25. The cost of the frigate included in this sum was put

at \$99,727. To build this frigate much of the timber destined for the three vessels which Congress had decided not to continue and which had been procured after many difficulties from the finest stock in the country was sent to Portsmouth by direction of the Secretary of War.

The first mention of the famous figurehead of the vessel afterwards named the "Constitution" is found in a letter from the Secretary of War to the Secretary of the Treasury on September 20, 1796, in which he says: "Mr. John Skillen of Boston has been mentioned to me by Mr. Rush as a qualified artist to undertake the carving of the head or figure for the frigate building at that town. As it is proper that this work should be immediately commenced you will be pleased to give such orders as may be necessary on the occasion. There is a drawing of the figure (a Hercules) now preparing which I shall send forward to Mr. Skillen as soon as finished."

An interesting sidelight on the proving of guns is given in a letter of September 27th. The Secretary of War writes:

"I believe the best explanation relative to the proving by water will be to give Mr. Hughes a more detailed view of the mode in which the experiment will be directed to be made. The object of the water proof is to discover whether there are any holes which penetrate through the sides of the cannon. For this purpose the examiners will be instructed, after the cannon have undergone the proof by powder, to place them upon a thick piece of timber so as they may be easily made to turn upon it. The touchhole will be stopped with a wooden peg covered with tallow. The cannon will then be raised, and the chase surrounded with linen, so that any water which may fall down the sides on filling the bore shall not be confounded with the drops that may filter through the metal, and with the same view the water will be poured into the cavity by means of the spout of a watering pot. The water will be then pressed upon by ~~an arm~~ covered with thick cloth so as to fill

exactly the muzzle of the cannon. During this operation the exterior will be attentively watched to see whether any water passes through the metal. If the least filtration appears the cannon will be refused."

It is perhaps not surprising that the early records of our Army and Navy show many gun explosions.

In November, 1796, the Secretary of War urges Naval Constructor Stoddard, at Baltimore, to push the work with more expedition, as the other two frigates show greater progress.

I have been unable to find any data showing how the first frigates came to receive their names. The letter-book is silent on this subject and the first mention appears to be in the report of Representative Parker from the Committee of the House on January 25, 1797, in which mention is made of "The frigate building at Philadelphia, of 44 guns, and called the 'United States'", "the Frigate building at Boston called the 'Constitution' of 44 guns", "the frigate 'Constellation' building at Baltimore of 36 guns."

It would be of great interest to discover who was responsible for the selection of these names, *but it is probable that it was done by President Washington himself*

The report of the Secretary of War, James McHenry, to Congress in January, 1797, states:

"The measures that have been taken to prepare the rigging and sails and to procure the necessary stores, and the advances made towards the final equipment of the frigates render it probable that they may be got ready for sea in about two months after being launched. While on this subject permit me to observe that if Congress perceive advantages in the extension of their marine or think it expedient that early precaution should be taken to secure to the United States a lasting fund of live oak for future use it will be proper that authority should be given for the purpose,

as well as to purchase a scite for a navy yard. The probability is that an article so important to maritime nations as live oak will be sought after with much avidity and that the land which is clothed with it may pass into hands that may make its attainment hereafter more expensive if not impracticable."

It may be of interest to note that out of the appropriation ~~in~~ *of* 1799 the Navy Department purchased the sites for the Navy Yards at Gosport (now Portsmouth, Va.), Washington, D.C., Philadelphia, Brooklyn, Charlestown, and Portsmouth, N.H., and at the same time acquired Groner's Island, three hundred and fifty acres, and Blackbear's Island, sixteen hundred acres, for the purpose of obtaining a permanent supply of live oak. These lands are at present still owned by the Department.

The Secretary of War made the following statements of the progress made in building the three frigates *upto January 1797.*

U. S. S. "United States", 44 guns,
building at Philadelphia.

all planked
"The hull is ~~of plank~~ *all planked* inside and out and all the ~~upper~~ *principle* decks are laid and caulked, excepting a part of the gun deck. The upper deck beams are in and a part of them kneed: *about* half of the bottom is dubbed off and a considerable part caulked: ~~the~~ braces and pintles for the rother are all cast: ~~the~~ *the* knee of the head together with the figure are nearly ready: ~~all~~ other parts of the hull is in such forwardness that it is expected she may be launched by the beginning of April next, provided the winter does not prove severe. The rigging is all made and nearly fitted: *yarns* for the cables are spun; the anchors and iron ballast on hand; and the blocks, dead-eyes, water casks, boats, lanterns and all the tin work are provided. The other materials are in part procured and the work *generally* progressing rapidly towards completion."

U. S. S. "Constitution", 44 guns,
building at Boston.

whole
The ~~hull~~ *whole* of the frame is raised and is ready for planking. The ~~wholes~~ *whole* are prepared and it is expected will be on and fastened this month. The keelsons are in their places and bolted

off. The masts are now on hand and the boats are building: All the dead-eyes for lower and topmast on shrouds are made and stripped: The knees for all the decks are procured as well as the beams, carlings, ledges, etc.: Iron ballast sufficient is in store: And the necessary materials for completing the hull are procured and received. The hemp for the cables, rigging, etc., and blocks are in the hands of the respective tradesmen manufacturing: And if the winter should prove favorable there is no doubt but that ship may be launched in July next. "

U. S. S. "Constellation", 36 guns,
Building at Baltimore.

rigging The ^{whole} hull of the frame is raised, the ^{wales} ~~wales~~, black-strakes, flush, quarter and fore ~~drills~~ on and dressed off: The ~~galling~~ clamps for gun, lower and orlop decks are all in and dubbed off: The beams are prepared and ready to be put into their respective stations: The bottom is now planking and the knees are getting ready for the decks. Other parts of the hull are progressing as fast as the workmen can be employed to advantage, and from present appearances this ship may be launched in May next. The lower, topmast and top gallant shrouds with all their respective stays are fitted and ready to go over the mastheads. The other rigging is also in great forwardness. The ~~boats~~ are all built, the water casks mostly made, together with the blocks, dead-eyes, ~~parts~~, etc., etc. The cannon for the gun deck are all in the navy yard, trimmed and are ready for mounting in the carriages which are made."

The following sums were estimated as being necessary to complete the frigates: U. S. S. "United States": \$55,950

U. S. S. "Constitution": 96,571.71

U. S. S. "Constellation": 47,375.

It was also stated that the Department had sold perishable materials originally acquired for the other three frigates for a total of \$4,214.05.

The work of completing the three frigates continued during the winter and spring of 1797. On April 17th the Secretary of War wrote

to Naval Constructor Stodder at Philadelphia expressing his surprise that the "Constellation" could not be launched until July and urging him to use all possible expedition and "at the same time to be as frugal as possible in every part of the business."

The letter-book has the following interesting entry:

"The frigate "United States", of 44 guns, was launched from Mr. Joshua Humphrey's yard (Southwark) Philadelphia, Wednesday, May 10, 1797, at fifteen minutes past one o'clock p.m."

On May 23rd the Secretary of War writes to General Henry Jackson, the naval agent at Boston, "It may be proper that you should be informed that I am desirous ~~that~~ each of the frigates shall be furnished with both suits of sails of this country manufacture."

On June 16th Secretary McHenry communicated to Congress the following statements in regard to the state of forwardness of the three frigates and of the further sums necessary to complete them:

U. S. S. "United States."

"The hull of this ship was launched on the 10th of May last. The bottom is completely coppered; and the carpenter's work is nearly finished and she will be soon in a situation to receive her masts and stores. Several of the masts, yards and ~~kits~~ are finished and the remainder are under way. The boats are in hand: All the rigging, blocks, dead-eyes and one suit of sails are prepared, all the principal ~~masts~~ and the small stores are provided, and the captain reports that the ship may be rigged and completed for use in one month after the guns and lower masts are on board."

U. S. S. "Constitution".

The bottom of this ship is ~~cleared~~ ^{square d?} off and the ~~Caulkers~~ ^{and the Caulkers} are at work. The various decks are laid; The ~~Beneath-boards~~ ^{Diagonal riders} and counter timbers are all in and secured, and the mast makers are employed on the masts and yards. All the boats excepting the pinnace are built. The riggers are at work

on the rigging which will be soon ready: the water casks are in hand: sails are prepared, and the constructor reports the ship may be launched about the 20th of August next. The captain is of opinion she may be completely equipped in one month after."

U. S. S. "Constellation."

"The latest report states that this ship is in great forwardness. The bottom is caulked and finished: the lower deck is laid, and the other decks are in a forward state: The head, quarter galleries and stern are partly done, and the bowsprit is almost ready to be put on board. The materials for the equipment and rigging are all procured, one suit of sails are made and all the guns for the gun deck are in the navy yard and mounted on their carriages. The constructor states that this ship will be launched next month and from the forward state of the masts, yards and rigging together with the other equipments there is reason to conclude she can be completely fitted for sea in one month after she is launched."

These estimates of the further sums necessary to complete were added:

"United States", at Philadelphia,	\$64,820
"Constitution", at Boston,	93,470
"Constellation", at Baltimore,	79,414
Total.....	\$236,704

Balance unexpended of last appropriation.....	\$ 40,068
To be provided.....	197,636

During this summer the letter-book contains many entries relating to the purchase of equipment and stores for the three ships, as well as for the frigate building under contract at Portsmouth and destined as a present to the Dey of Algiers. On July 7th the Secretary of War writes to Captain T. Thompson who had been employed to take the ship out to the Mediterranean:

"It being necessary to fix on a name for the frigate intended for the Dey of Algiers before she sails from Portsmouth, I have, therefore, concluded to call her the "Crescent" which name you will be pleased to have inserted in her papers and other documents. I have just received your favor of the 29th ultimo and I congratulate you and Mr. Hackett on the safe launching of the frigate into her proper element."

1797
Congress, in June, passed a bill for the completing and manning of the three frigates. It will be remembered that for some years the merchant vessels of the United States had been subjected to vexations and spoliations committed by Corsairs and privateers of several of the European countries. The French in the West Indies were the worst offenders, though there were many instances of the seizure of our ships by the British and Spaniards. The public documents of the period abound in references to these troubles. President Washington on many occasions called the attention of Congress to these depredations and his successor, President Adams, told Congress that a Navy establishment would ~~be~~ afford the only adequate protection. Hence it is not surprising that we find the Secretary of War using every effort to place the three frigates in commission and showing exasperation at the continued delays, especially in the case of the "Constellation", building at Baltimore. Some difficulty appears to have arisen over her launching, and Naval Constructor Humphreys was ordered to Baltimore to assist Constructor Stodder in making safe preparations. The frigates "Constitution" and "Constellation" were ordered coppered before launching. Meanwhile the "United States", which had evidently received some slight damage in launching had been repaired and was lying in the stream taking on board her guns. Captain Barry was ordered to obtain a crew and the riggers had nearly completed the rigging. ^{writes the Secretary} "Unfortunately," all further progress was impeded by the contagious fever which attacked several of the officers and crew that were on board; several of

the tradesmen employed in the equipment were also from the same cause prevented from attending to their respective occupations until the latter end of October, when it was found to be too late in the season to get the ship in complete order to meet a winter at sea. The "Constellation" was launched at Baltimore on the 7th of September and was anchored in the Patapsco to receive on board her stores, officers and crew.

The Secretary of War writes on September 10, 1797, to Naval Constructor Claghorne at Boston:

"I received your letter of the 4th instant yesterday informing me of the present state of the frigate "Constitution", and submitting the propriety of launching her during the high tides of the present month, noticing at the same time that the work which must be done after getting her into the water could be cheapest performed while on the stocks. If in your opinion it would be unsafe to trust to the tides in October I very readily agree to her being launched in this month; but if we may venture the delay until October and it would be a saving in point of expense I should prefer it, especially as it does not appear to me that anything could be gained by a premature launch to counterbalance the expense."

Accordingly the "Constitution" was launched at Boston on the 21st of October and was reported in December ~~reported~~ as ready for service early in the ensuing spring.

The following letter from Naval Constructor Claghorne to the Secretary of War gives a brief account of the previous attempts to launch the "Constitution":

"Having before stated to you my intention of launching the frigate "Constitution" on the 20th instant, (September, 1797) the necessary preparations were made to that end. And at the time appointed all blocks and shores were removed with full expectation of her moving gently into the

water. She, however, did not start until screws and other machinery had been applied; and then she moved only about 27 feet. x x x. I found that ~~a~~ ^{the} part of the ways which had not before received any of the weight had settled about half an inch. x x x. The next day after due preparation the ship was raised two inches x x x. Her bilge ways were then taken out and the apparent defects removed. All things being in order a second attempt was made on the 22nd instant and upon the removal of her supports she moved freely for about 31 feet and then stopped. x x x. On examining the ways erected on the new wharf I found they had both settled abaft about 1-5/8 of an inch; which circumstance, as it could not have been foreseen, the descent of the ways was not calculated to overcome. x x x x. I am fully confident that the next trial on the high tides in October will be attended with success."

Congress met again in November, 1797, and in the following month the Secretary of War reported that the following additional sums would be necessary to complete and equip the frigates for use:

"United States"	\$22,557
"Constitution"	26,275
"Constellation"	22,319
Total.....	\$72,151
Balance of last appropriation unexpended...	35,554
Additional appropriation required.....	36,597.

This was exclusive of the cost of the military stores and all the

maintenance cost of the vessels when placed in commission.

On the 19th of March, 1798, the President sent to Congress a message dealing with the increasingly strained relations with France and reiterated his recommendations for the adoption of measures for the protection of American commerce. On March 27, 1798, Congress appropriated \$115,833 to complete and equip for sea ~~for~~ ^{the} frigates "United States", "Constitution" and "Constellation," and \$2,200 to defray the salaries of persons having charge of the ~~navy~~ ^{at} yards, New York, Norfolk and Portsmouth where the uncompleted ships were lying. On March 8th a committee of the House of Representatives recommended the creation in the War Department of an office which should be employed in the immediate superintendence of the navy concerns of the United States, the officer in charge to be called The Commissioner of Marine.

In an interesting and exhaustive report to Congress on March 22nd the Secretary of War reviews the construction of the ships. He states that various considerations, such as the rise in the price of labor and materials, the loss of two cargoes of oak in its passage from Georgia, the loss of hemp by fire in Boston, the cost of an additional wharf to insure the safe launching of the frigate "United States," the expense of ~~heaving~~ ^{heaving} down the "United States" to repair an injury done to her ~~false~~ ^{false} keel and rudder braces by striking the ground in launching, the expense occasioned by repeated trials in attempts to launch the frigate "Constitution", the expense of double freight in removing some of the live oak and other timber from one yard to another, ^{were among the causes of} ~~caused~~ the difference between the estimated and the real cost of the armament. He continues:

finished
"The frigates are now nearly ~~completed~~ and from the best judgment that can be formed respecting them, *have* ~~never~~ appeared on the ocean and such as would do credit to the most skillful workmen of countries more experienced in naval architecture than ours x x x x If the United States contemplate an arrangement for properly providing naval protection to ~~our~~ commerce, suitable to the resources of the country and its relative situation to foreign powers, the marine business in such a case ought to be ~~supported from~~ separated from the Department of War or the Department of War enabled by proper institutions to conduct it in a manner more conformable to the practice of other nations."

On the 30th of April, 1798, the office of the Secretary of the Navy was established by law. Benjamin Stoddert, of Georgetown, was appointed to the office. The records of the Department contain nothing to show when the "Constitution", "United States" and "Constellation" were actually ready for sea. ~~It is possible that they were not formally commissioned.~~ Secretary Stoddert on taking office found them practically in a state of readiness. The year 1798 was the beginning of the quasi war with France. The "United States", Captain John Barry, was ordered to sea in July. Captain Truxton was ordered to sea in the "Constellation" on the 10th of August and the "Constitution", Captain Nicholson, was ordered to patrol the coast on the 13th of August.

"The frigates are now nearly finished and from the best judgment that can be formed respecting them, promise to prove the most complete of their kind that have appeared on the ocean; and such as would do credit to the most skillful workmen of countries more experienced in naval architecture than ours x x x x. If the United States contemplate an arrangement for properly providing naval protection to their commerce, suitable to the resources of the country and its relative situation to foreign powers, the marine business in such a case ought to be separated from the Department of War, or the Department of War enabled by proper institutions to conduct it in a manner more conformable to the practice of other nations."

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These are a few of the features of the building of the first ships of the Navy of the United States. Their records throughout the years have been a monument to the men who planned them, the men who built them and the men who manned them. All of them became victors in battle - the "Constellation" in the actions against the French frigates "Vengeance" and "Insurgente", the "United States"

in the victory over the British "Macedonian", and the "Constitution" in the capture of the British "Guerriere", "Java", "Cyane" and "Levant". Two of the three, the "Constitution" and the "Constellation" are proudly carried on the rolls of the Navy today, one hundred and seventeen years after their launching. May they long continue as a living inspiration to the nation.