Narrative of the Cruises of the U. S. Frigate Constitution

By Thomas C Byron

Charlestown January 1861.

On the return of the Constitution from France, Captain Nathaniel Haraden then Captain of the Yard overhauled her and put her in sailing order for Captain Hull he having sailed in her before. We took in river water for the cruise and provisions and dropped down to Alexandria where we lay when the Declaration of war was read on board the officers and crew giving three cheers. Shouldering a gold chain or a wooden leg, this was the spirit of that noble crew. The next morning we dropped down the river and on the 4th of July lay at Annapolis where we fired at a target with large and small guns. Next morning we sailed for Boston and when crossing Nantucket Shoals fell in with a British squadron seven in number, the African sixty four, Guerriere, Shannon, Belvidere, Eolus & Sinnaches. I believe we fell in with them in the night, the next morning it was calm and foggy and they were not more than two thirds gun shot off. Captain Hull then said to his men, we are almost surrounded but before I will give up the ship I will blow her up and go with her; we then gave three cheers and the Captain ordered the pursers steward to bring up bread butter and cheese on the quarter

Deck, this was done and we all partook of it and then prepared for our escape. Charles Morris first Lieutenant sounded and found bottom at thirty five fathom. We out Boats bent on a hawser to cage anchor, took it to the capstain, carried out the cage and dropped it, we then manned the capstain hove up to it at the same time carrying out the umbrella to relieve the cage anchor; this is the way we warped away from them, at the same time we hoisted our flag and commenced firing stern guns which assisted us. The headmost Ship fired two broad sides but did no damage they then fired bow guns which was in our favor. They had 15 boats towing the head ship but all to no use. About 12 o'clock the breeze sprung up and by Sun down we run out of sight of them and arrived at Boston. We then took in provisions for a six months cruise and put to sea. This was in the latter part of July cruising on the grand banks we fell in with the Guerriere frigate, one of the same ships that was in the Squadron that chased us off Nantucket Shoals & in a storm was separated from the rest, this was about 4 o'clock A.M. on the 19th day of August. We had just had our grog when the man at mast head cried "Sail Ho", the officer of the deck says, "wear away, stewing ward about three points on the weather bow." "What does she look like?" "A Frigate." "Bypon beat to quarters and clear away your guns, get up Shot and prepare for action". The enemy bore down upon us smartly, firing her Starboard broadside

drawing nigh luffed and brought her larboard guns to bear. By this time she had played with us long enough and Captain Hull gave orders to fire and the first broadside told so well that the foremast fell and the second done the same and carried the mizen from the main one brave lad exclaimed "We have made a brig of her", we then got afoul of each other and tried to board but could not, the sea run so high but at the same time a gun was got out of the cabin windows and shot away their main mast which fell on our ship splitting her larboard side down to the waters edge and breaking off part of the mizen topsail yard and rolled over board and she drifted off to leeward, Captain Hull then hailed him and asked him if he had struck, he said "yes", we then sent a boat for him and his officers, when Dacres came on board he offered Hull his sword, "You may keep it says brave Hull what makes you look so dull, step down in the cabin with me and I will quickly see what is best to be done". We continued bringing off the men and officers and whatever was wanted until 10 o'clock next day when we put a slow match to the magazine and blew her up and then returned to Boston. We made the harbor late in the afternoon the tide running out — the next morning Reguler squadron hove in sight, taking them for the British we buoyed our anchors and slipped our cables and run up to Boston. This finished the second cruise of the Constitution in 1812.

The third cruise of the Constitution was under Commodore William Bainbridge who was ordered to the Ship after Capt Hull left. We got ready for sea and stood for the Brazil coast where we cruised some time taking now and then a prize, We took a fourteen gun craft which Bainbridge burnt. We had some fresh meat whilst on that coast, he sent in and had a lot of cattle brought off which he hoisted in by the horns and slaughtered on board also yams and other produce which was very good with salt gut.—

At length we fell in with the Java Frigate commanded by Capt Lambert bound for Bombay, with copper sails and rigging for a seventy four and three hundred and fifty soldiers. She was to windward and taking us to be the Essex with short guns kept off but she soon found out her mistake when her fore and mizen fell and became almost a wreck drifting down to our stern and in a few minutes after her main mast fell stripping her complete, then Haslip hoisted the flag on a broom and lashed it to the stump of the mizen mast, we doubleshotted our guns and bore down on him which made him cut them down quick, we hailed him and asked him if he had struck he said "yes" we sent our boat aboard and brought off the officers; Capt Lambert was mortally wounded, General Hayslip was governor of Bombay and had money on board to pay off the troops of that place. We continued to bring off the men and such things as was of value untill 10 o'clock next day when we put a slow match to her magazine and blew her up, then went in to St Salvadore and landed the prisoners. Here we received orders from the American Consul to proceed home and not to stop or engage in anything on the passage, this order was obeyed and we returned to Boston. This ended the third cruise of the Constitution in 1812.

The fourth cruise of Old Ironsides was commanded by Charles Steward Esq. and a better man never stepd. He being well experienced we cruised among the West India islands. and while there we met vessels of all classes some of which we sink and burnt. some sent home and some others we chased. run a large brig of war ashore but could not get her. We chased the Lafeake frigate through the moner passage and lost her in a thunder squall it being so dark it was thought she changed her course in the night to deceive us for we run all around but could not find any thing of her. We still cruised around finding nee and then a vessel and in a short time had a number of prisoners on board and not liking to be troubled with them any longer he was determined the next small vessel he took, he would make a cartel off. and shortly after he fell in with an old bark owned by the Captain of her. Capt Steward agreed with him to take the prisoners to England and he Steward would give his wife the bark this was done. We cruised a little longer and came home in the spring, but the British cruisers had come on the course. We made Portsmouth harbor about daylight on sunday morning, and about sunrise saw two friggates standing in from sea. and having no pilot we had to start for Boston, but our ship having so much prize stuff on board she could not sail, so that we had to throw overboard a great quantity of it such as soap, candles, rum, brandy, wine, and all other things that would help us escape from the enemy. But as it happened we had a

man on board who belonged in Marblehead and who carried Old Ironsides safe in this was on Sunday about ten o'clock, and by twelve o'clock the military had arrived and the two ships laying off about two gun shots from the fort, we had the redhot shot ready for them for they layed off a while and then steal off and that night we warpt over to Salem and lay there about a fortnight, when we got under way and came to Boston. This was the end of the fourth cruise of Old Ironsides in the war of 1812...

The fifth and last cruise of the Constitution in the war of 1812 was under the command of Charles Stuard Esq Dec 19th, old Ironsides went out with substantially the same officers and men, she first went off Bermuda thence via Madeira into the Bay of Biscay, where she narrowly escaped sinking one night, being on a wind larboard tacks a board driving at the rate of nine knots, the lee house hold plug came out and in one half hour she would have sunk, the water had allready filled the gundeck and was pouring down in to the hold of the ship, the gunner ran on deck and reported to the officer of the deck, Shubrick the state of things, saying the ship was sinking his reply was," Well if she does We will all go with her, let go the lee braces, haul in the wether braces and put her before it, stop the hawsehole and rig and man the chain pumps and man them well. This was done and in about an hour and a half she was free, again braced braced up and sailing along as usual. She was also thrown down on her beam ends by a squall when cruising off Bermuda and a man lanched overboard going aloft to reef topsails at the same time and being a good swimmer was picked up, he came alongside bailing the boat with his hat as the boat had not been lowered down for four months and caked bad; Huffman

then officer of the deck charged him with trying to run away from the ship jesting he said I have a great mind to give you a dozen for attempting to run away, turning around laughing he said Pursers steward give smoky half a pint of whiskey.
After this we went off Lisbon where we fell in with a 74 and chased him allmost up to the rock and they immediately sent out boats to catch the old craft but the bird had flew in the night; a large ship came alongside and after hailing her two or three times without any answer we fired two or three guns to compel her to answer which she did through an interpreter and found her to be a Portugeese Trigate, Steward thinking it not prudent to stay long in one place stood off about twenty or thirty leagues southwesterly this was on the 20th at one P.M saw a strange sail heading southwesterly the old craft hauled up a little and made chase it was not long before another sail was made to leward of the first vessel they kept along and the old craft coming closer and closes to them, about sunset both ships ranged alongside of the Constitution within half gun shot, Steward steps up on the cannonade the after side of the gangway and said to his men I understand there was some dissatisfaction in not having a fight with something before going home but now you will have fighting enough. The vessells being right to commence ordered

them to fire and it was returned first from one ship then from the other but the old craft had as good a master as ever stepped a ships deck Samuel Hickson was the man, great credit was due Mr Hickson in maneuvering so as to prevent their raking her as she was backing and filling the whole action. This was the smartest action ever fought it being in the night and two ships on one but that ship's crew was not beat so easy, we took them both and could have taken two more in one hour afterwards. There was not a ship we took that was half a mug for old Ironsides and she could take another like her in one hour after as she never lost any of her spars and but about 12 or 15 men in any fight she had, and her crew was the smartest and her men the most capable ever known in the annals of history. Many of her men had been brought up on the sea, some had been masters of vessels both as sailors and marines and they were as united as brothers. They were all ways merry and lively and the officers liked to see them so, the officers would pipe all hands to mischief when we had a leisure afternoon, this was to encourage them. At one time in Boston harbor we were at this sport when a green looking country man came alongside the ship in a shore boat to look at the ship and having the whip on the main yard to whip in water one of the larks went down in the boat and commenced talking with the man

while another slipped the rope under his arms no sooner done than up he went crying a Turkey a Turkey, this was sport for the officers. They lowered him down on deck and showed him the ship he was a man over six foot high with broad brim hat, a long surtout and cane and cut a great figure in the air. After we captured the Cyane and Levant we started to the Isle of May to land the prisoners but when we got there we could not land them we went over to St Jago's and commenced landing them when the large ships made their appearance and we had to cut and run out and the three followed so close that we sent the prizes back and one of them was recaptured by them but they could not come up with the old craft, We stood off to the southward and went in to Murnam where we landed the balance of the prisoners and then returned home This was the last cruise of the old Constitution in the war of 1812

I forgot to mention to my readers above that when we were chased off St Jago's when landing prisoners we left what boats and men there was ashore and as soon as they saw the ship under way they seized the crew of the ship and made prisoners of them, but there was two of them that had a little money and were old enough for them, so they bribed them and got off back into the country where they remained until peace, knowing well as they were not American they would not be exchanged although

naturalized citizens one was a Swede, Peter Miller and the other Francis Fox was a French man, they always had money and came home after the war and lived in Salem Mass and became rich. Peter Miller got to be a great merchant and owned a great many ships and was a fine man but the other poor fellows who were made prisoners off had to be sent to England and exchanged by which they were detained three or four months after Peace—

I must now correct many things stated in the Naval history concerning the proceedings of the chasing and maneuvering of the British Squadron, We fell in with them in the morning about sunrise and at sundown they were all out of sight and we arrived at Boston without seeing them again untill we went out and fell in with the Guerriere and captured her. I must also further state that it was false to say the Guerriere ever fired a gun after she got foul of the Constitution but the Constitution shot away her last mast standing and she drifted off to leeward. The statement is also false of the Java's running her Gibbon into the Constitution, she had none and but one mast standing and became unmanageable and run down to leeward about 100 feet from the stern of the old craft all was still when Bryon having his

gun loaded, jumped down from the booms and run aft and fired shooting a man in the top. She had not gone far before the mast fell Hayslip then hoisted the flag on a boom when we run down on him and he gave up without firing a gun. There has been a great deal added to make a large story of it and many things left out that should be in, having been chased 3 days and nights and believing each other at quarters is false altogether as many other statements. However there was nothing done on board of that ship but what was succesful during that war with England in 1812. I might of course make a great deal more of it but I have left out many small things that I thought not worth notice But my readers may rely on this being a true statement from one whose station was on the quarter deck to receive orders and had a chance to see and hear all that was said or done on board during the whole war. The survivors of the Constitution are Andrew Peterson gunner of the Navy at Norfolk and Thomas C Byron who are willing to certify to the truth of this. I shall give them credit for all they done, it is my view to state the things as they were; the Java was to windward and had the advantage, the Constitution not having got her sails secured before the Java fired a broadside in to her killing and wounding several men cutting one in two and taking of Charles Waldo's leg in the main

and she fired several distructive shots, one dismounting one of the guns on the forecastle another shot took the wheel and killed four men and wounded the quarter master but this was the most damage we received as to the Guerriere we wipt her so quick she did not know what to make of it. Byron belonged to the marines but the Captain rated him as a petty officer by which he drew three shares and a third prize money. There was a number of men on board who had been pressed on board of British man of war and knew what they were fighting for and would have drinked an English mans blood at that time I beleive I will say to my readers this was to stop the British from pressing our men out of our merchant men and putting them on board of their man of war and keeping them for life unless they could escape some way or another. Now I must make some remarks as to the act of congress, this was declared against Great Britain in 1815 Congress passed an act that every man should receive prize money for every prize they took and if they did not have a chance to get them in if they destroyed them from the enemy they should be paid for them all the same. But this was never done we took the Guerriere and Java Frigates besides several other small prizes and destroyed them and government gave for that 1000 dollars. When Lord Hayslip exclaimed as she blew up there

goes thru million of money, this was a damper on John Bull another prize we sent in with some prize goods amounting to about 1000 dollars of which government took their part, but what become of all the rest of the prizes? The Cyane came home a good little thigate built Ship and was kept in the service and worn out also the Levant was paid for by the Portugese sixty thousand and not a cent did I ever get of it when I was entitled to three shares and a third of prize money according to my rank as I ranked with all rated officers under a commission. Now I must say something in behalf of my shipmates whose names should never be erased from the pages of fame and long may they be remembered by the lovers of this country God rest the brave. I will now state the undaunted and brave expression of a young man who was Captain of the Gun that was capsized by a shot from the Java, this shot came in the port and struck the gun and turned it over complete Kingman on looking at the disaster his gun had met with, clapped his hand on his back and exclaimed now fire at that; he and his men then righted the gun up again and said now I will pay you for it and commenced firing again, this was in the battle of the Java. Lieut Shubrick being stationed at one of the gun deck divisions got his coat caught under the buck

of one of the guns when
firing her and took a jack
knife and cut it off and
when he came on deck
after the battle he looked
like a pigeon with his tail
plucked out but this was
nothing he he was one of
the best officers in the
ship and as good a
sailor as ever stepped
a ships deck and was
the man who so calmly
replied to the Gunner when
he reported to him that the
ship was sinking "If she
goes we will go with her."
He was one of the calmest
men when he was on duty
that could be found and
a good man every way.
Now I will state in what
manner we contrived to
do the duty which we so
bravely performed, a man
was always kept aloft
on the main top mast cross-
trees with a spyglass
to look out and as soon
as he would see anything
he would cry out ahead so
where away it was and
then all hands was called
to make for her, then it
was make sail and trim
ship; no man allowed
to go below except on
duty, every man busy
carrying shot fore and
aft to trim ship, or
making sail, heaving
the log and liming her
by the hour glass to see
what way she would
sail best, this we had
to do as she would get
out of trim by taking
out wood and water
every day, this we always
done when in chase and
never left

I will now give the names of the officers attached to the old craft through-out the whole war of 1812. The first commander Capt Hull, two cruises, first lieutenant Charles Morris, second Wards-worth, third Reed, fourth Huffman, fifth Morgan, Boatswain, Peter Adams Sailing master, Elvin. John Day masters mate Wegen sail maker & Varnum midshipman Third cruise Commodore William Bainbridge, first lieutenant, Parker, second Huffman, third Shubrick, his brother and Morgan were the other two, Elvin was also promoted to lieutenant, the boatswain was the same this was the time we took the Java in 1813

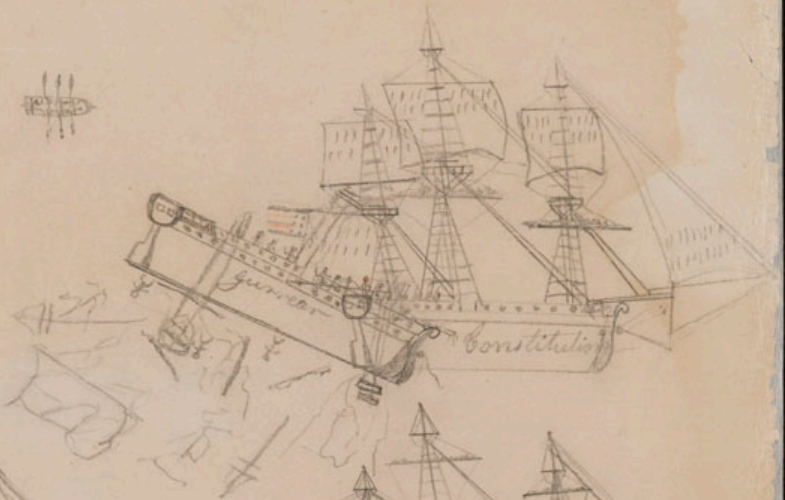
Fourth cruise Captain Charles Steward, first lieutenant Babitt, second Huffman, third George Shubrick, fourth Morgan, fifth Hunter, Sailing master, Samuel Hickson, boatswain James Watson, gunner Davis, midshipmen Comming and Going every cruise I could not keep the run of them. I knew every man in the Ship at that time I will mention some of them. The first cruise there was Mattison I Batey sailing masters mate, Delany Purser Tue, Purser Steward, Nicholas Fountain masters mate Waldo and Whipple who were also boarding masters and boarded them in an English lieutenants uniform, midshipmen Gordon, Cross, Palmer, and Stearns, Winter gunner, Anderson and

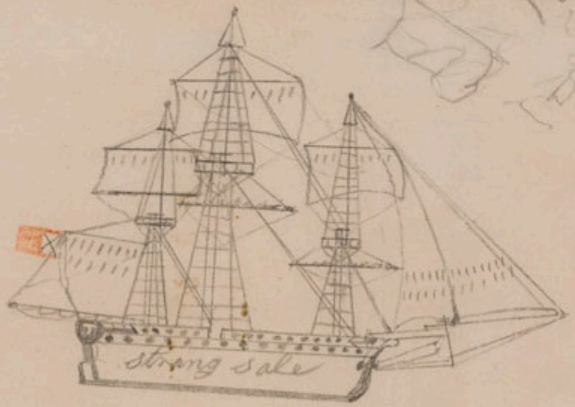
Darling in her last cruise
Now I will state our
sufferings on the night we
crossed the equinoctial
line, that night all hands
came near dying for want
of water. A number were
dipping up with tin pots the
water that had fallen from
a small shower into the
boats on deck and mixed with
the salt water that had flew
over the side into it also old
tobacco chews which the men
had thrown into the boats and
they had to drink it. About
daylight it began to rain as
it generally does in crossing
the line and we were very glad
but was not allowed to catch
a drop for our messes untill it
was all over, but had to get up
casks and spread sails over
the deck and fill them and
strike them down into the hole.
This was the way we had to live
Every shower the men would
run with their pots and cans
and stop the scupper holes up to
catch the water that fell on
deck, dirty as it was they had
to use it and some times it was
so tarry that they could hardly
swallow it others running &
catching a little here and
there upon the painted hammock
or some other place which would
be so painty that it was almost
impossible to use it, this was
hard for us and I will now
account to my readers for it;
in the first place we dare not
venture into a port in the day
time so that the enemy could
blockade us and having but
six months provisions and
water on board and daily
taking prisoners to help drink
it up. We had to put up with
two thirds rations of provisions
and three pints of water for
twenty four hours, this was
the cause of the great suffering
on board as the men could
not eat the salt grub
without water and this
caused Captain Steward
to search out a by place to

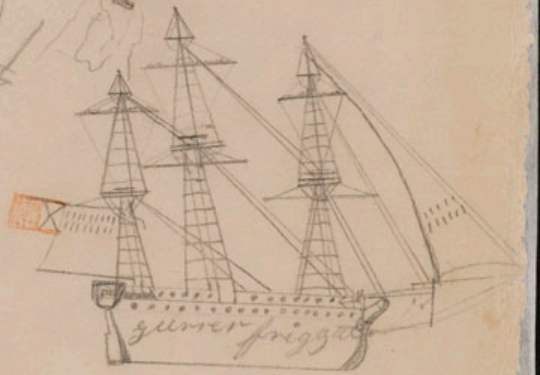
get water, so we run off to Juan Fernandez the place where Robinson Crusoe was cast away, it was a desolate island inhabited only by convicts transported by the Portugeese for crime and not allowed a boat or anything to get away with. They built a sort of a raft with a seat on it and a large basket in front of the seat to put their bait hooks and lines and fish into and every morning the wind is blowing off shore and they paddle away off and fish and as the wind blows in towards the land at night they come in with it — They have a variety of good fish and are glad to change them for meat or bread which we exchanged with them, there is another island that they send the women to for crime.

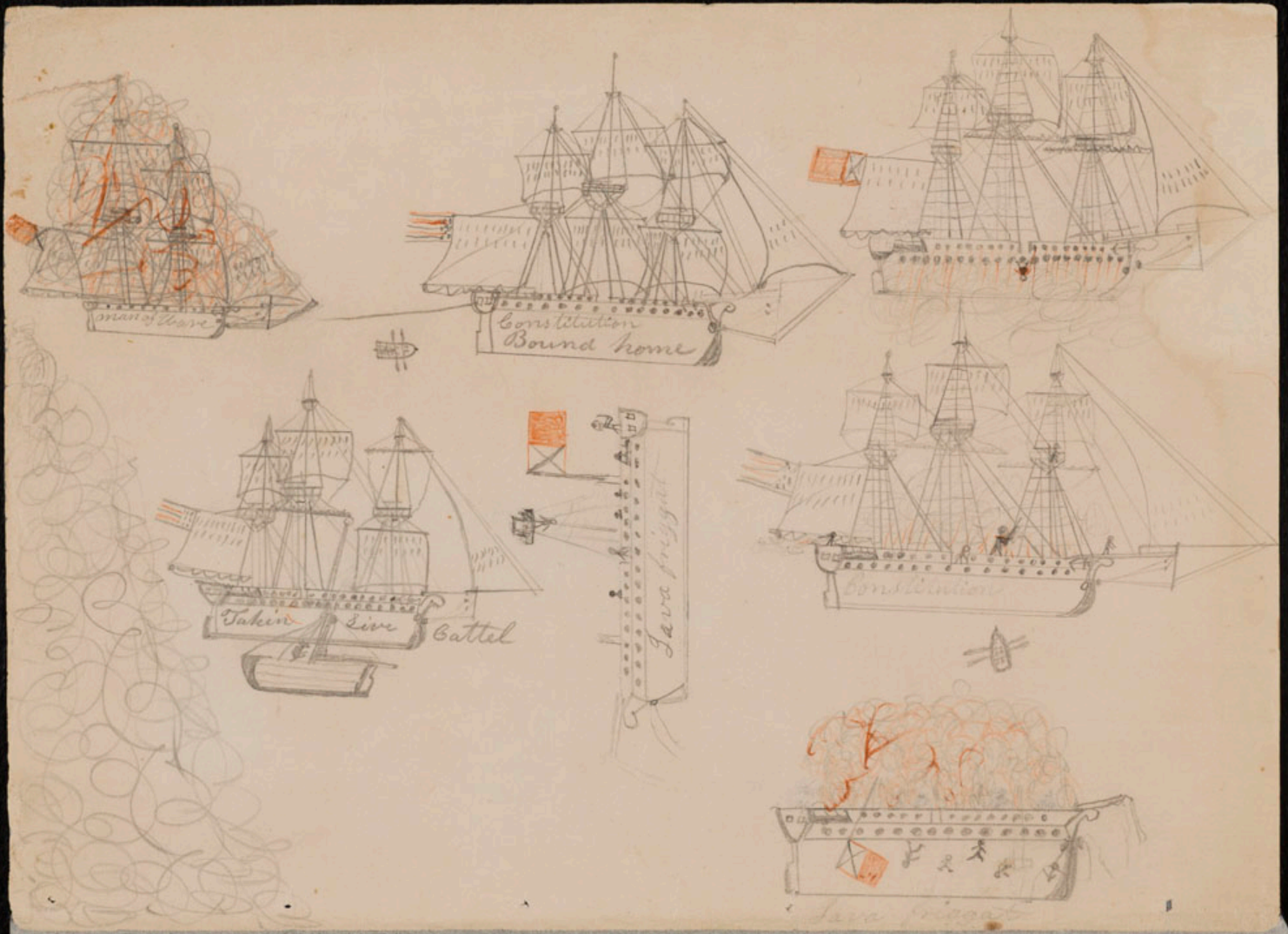

Constitution
Running fight
on a Scape from
the Brittish

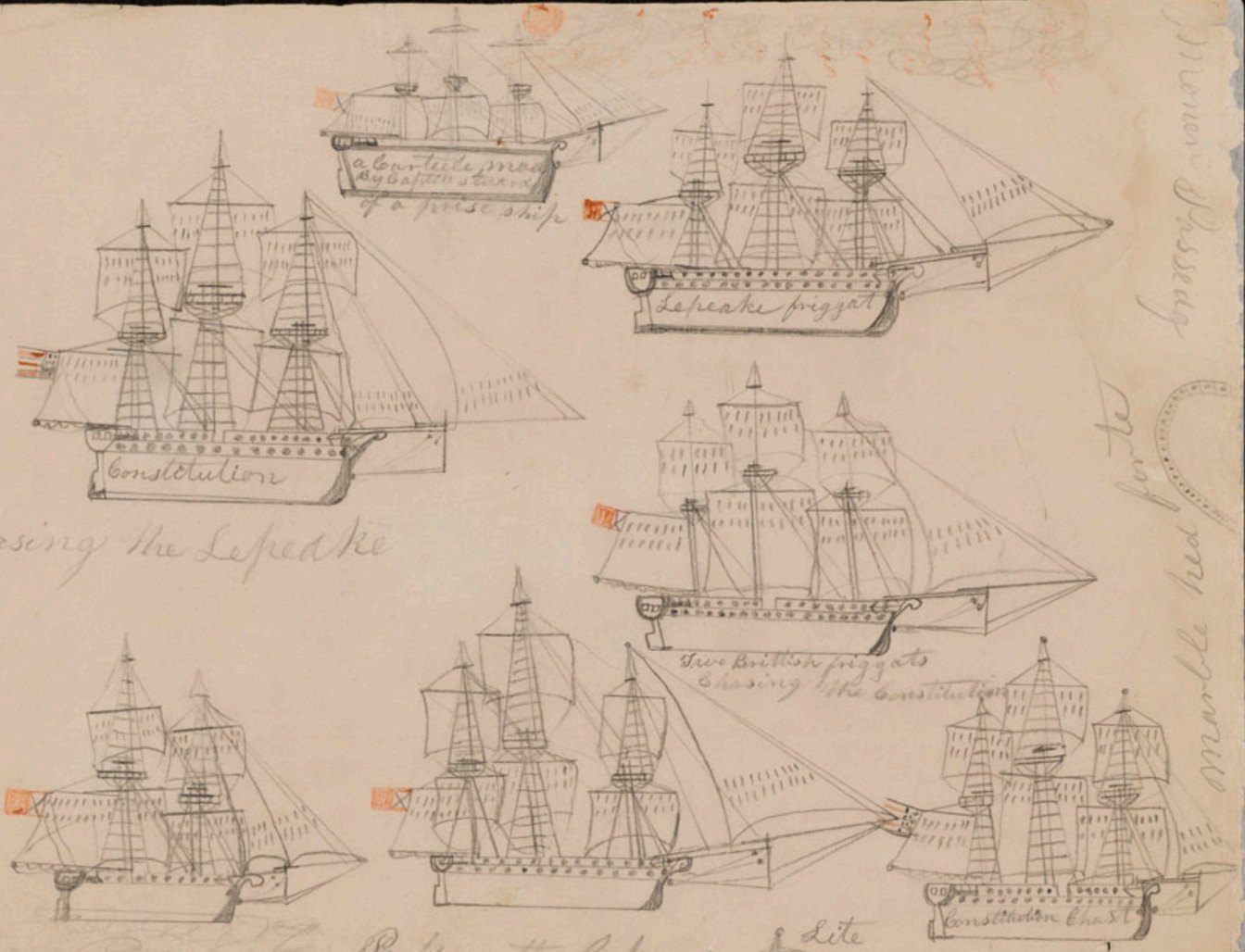
The Boat Returning from placing the Slow match

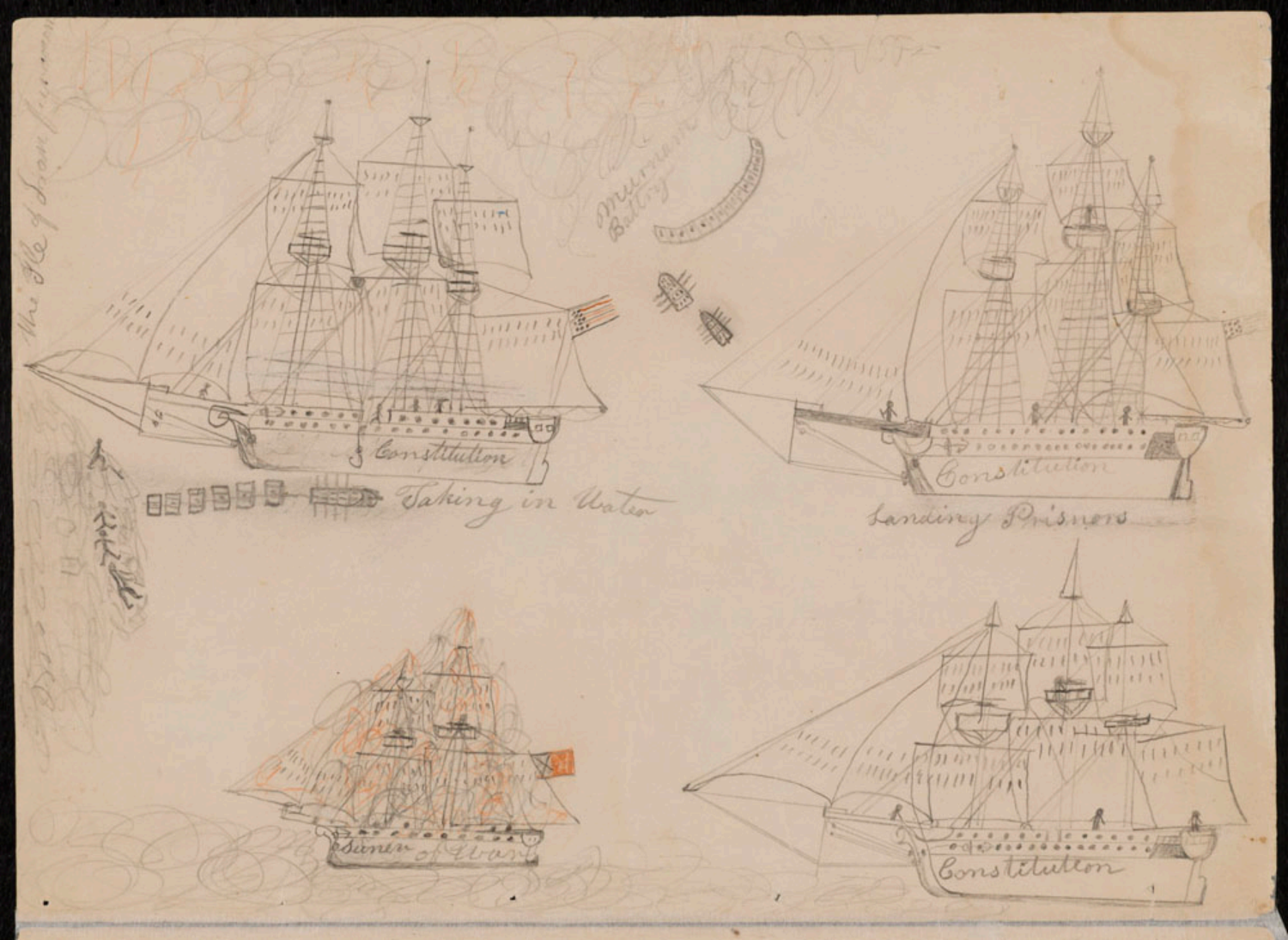


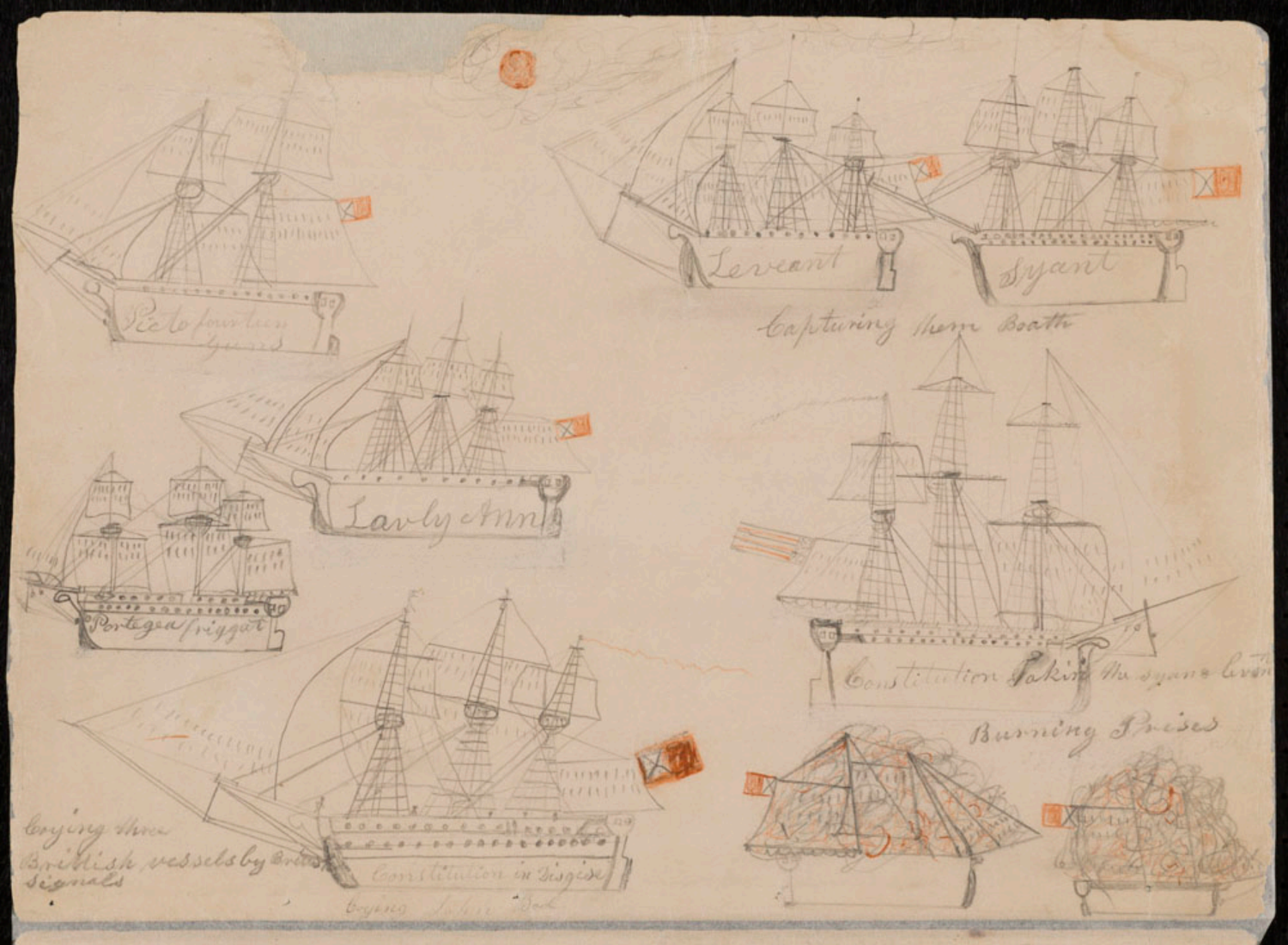




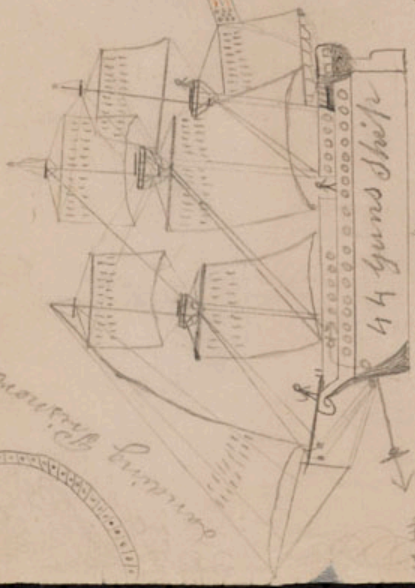

man of Wore
Constitution
Bound home
Taken
Give
Battel
Java frigat
Constitution
Java frigat

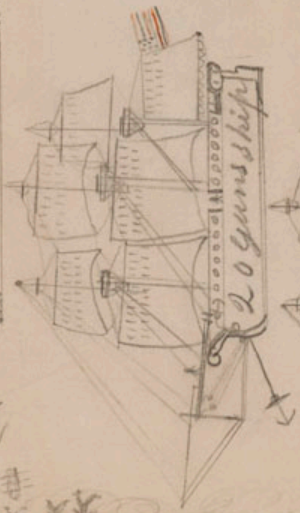

A Cartiele mode
By Captain Stewart
of a prise ship
Lepeake friggat
Constitution
Chasing the Lepeake
Two British friggats
Chasing the Constitution
Constitution Chas't
Portsmouth Capre as
Lite
Marble tred forte
Union Passing

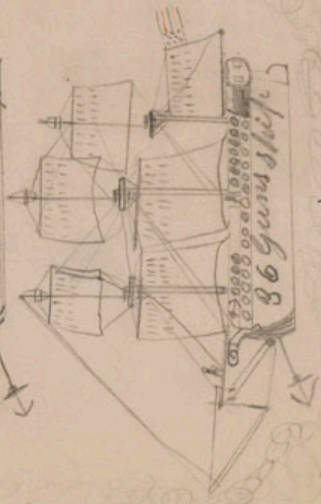

Constitution
Taking in Water
Mounment Battery
Constitution
Landing Prisoners
Saucer of War
Constitution


Levant
Syant
Capturing three Boats
Lady Ann
Portuguese frigate
Constitution taking the Syanna Levant
Burning Prizes
Constitution in Disguise
Crying three British vessels by British Signals

A Tenting To Trap old iron sids

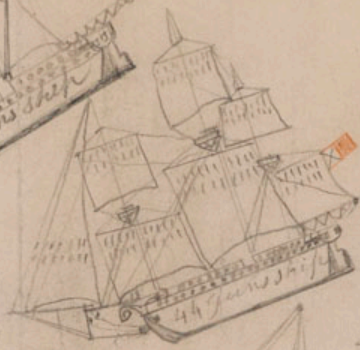


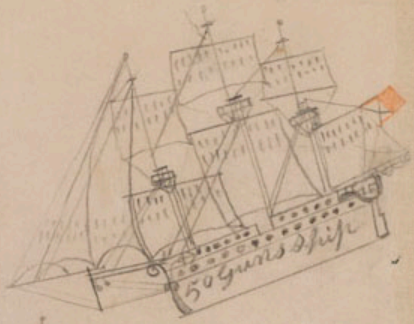


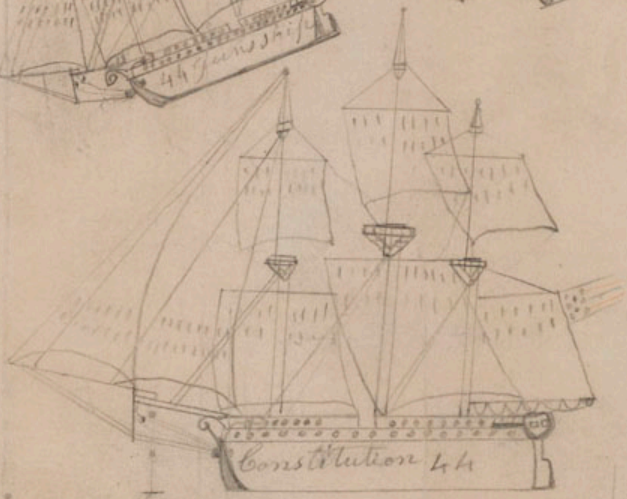


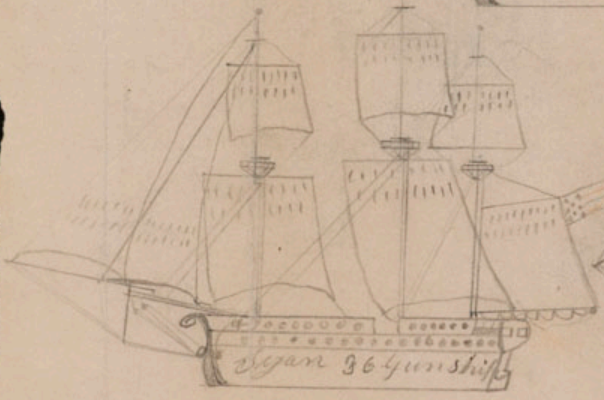
Drawing Master

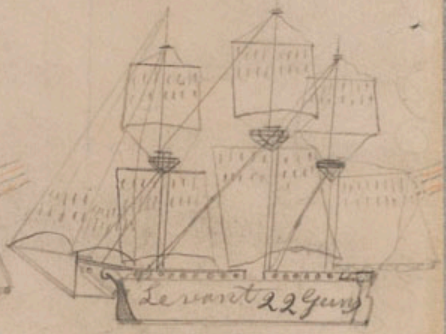

50 guns ship

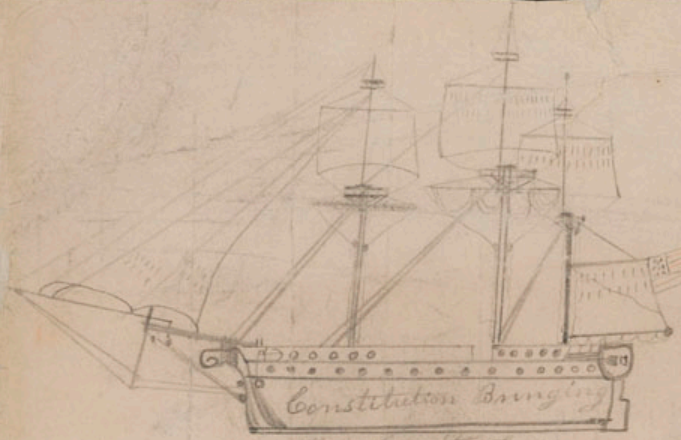

44 guns ship

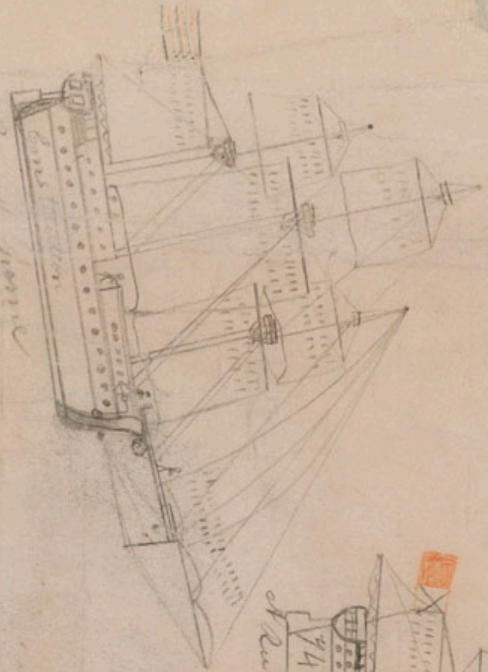

50 guns ship


Constitution 44

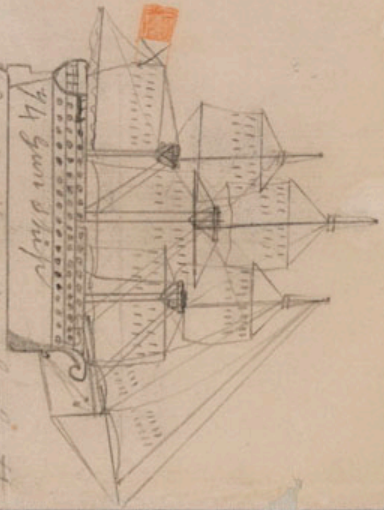

Vegan 36 guns ship

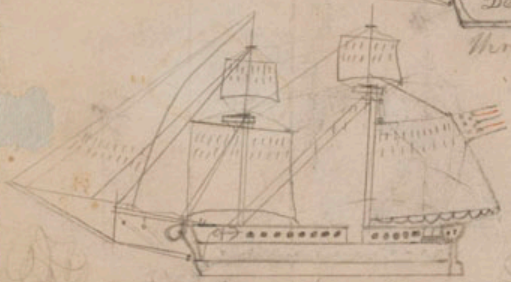

Levant 22 Guns


Constitution Bringing
Mos Craft Two


Beaver Frigate
Dorquick
Bottom Plan


Decator Brig
Throwing over Board her
Guns


74 Gun Ship
A Running from the old Craft


Jon. Armstrong