

“WAR ASEA AND ASHORE”

Joshua Crosby was born in 1779 and died in 1861. He is buried in the Orleans Cemetery. His home still stands near the end of Tonset Road, in the section named Weesit.

Joshua Crosby first went as a fisherman out of Nauset Harbor, then for a period went into whaling; took a turn at deep-sea fishing out of Salem and Boston, and later went into the Mediterranean fruit trade. In our Nation's war with Tripoli, Crosby enlisted as a mate gunner. His vessel came into Chesapeake Bay early in the summer of 1812 and he then enlisted to serve on the U.S. Frigate *Constitution* under Captain Isaac Hull. He became a gun captain on the aft spar deck on the starboard side, using a “carronade” that shot a 14 pound solid iron ball shot. The *Constitution* sailed from the Bay to cruise and harass British shipping off Nova Scotia. At noon on August 19, 1812, the *Constitution* sighted the enemy frigate *Guerriere*. Sailing alongside and at 40 yards range, the *Constitution* opened fire with a starboard broadside and in the 30 minute fight crippled the *Guerriere*.

In 1813 Joshua Crosby enlisted to fight in the fresh water Battle of Lake Erie, under Commodore Oliver Hazard Perry of Rhode Island. Commodore Perry, early in the year of 1813, went to Presque Isle (present Erie, Penn.). Men and a ship-builder were brought in; trees were felled, and inside Erie Harbor, two 110 foot, 500 ton brigs or “man-o-war” brigs were fitted with “carronades,” 32 pounders, which were short instruments. These vessels were the *Lawrence*, of Commodore Perry's Command, and the *Niagara*, with escorts of four 60 ton armed schooners. Later, Comm. Jesses D. Elliott brought in two more schooners. Comm. Elliott became Captain of the *Niagara*. The total number of men to serve this fleet should have been 740 but a scant 490 were garnered; less than 200 were Navy and 100 were Militiamen from nearby states. Also filling in were Indians, frontiersmen and a non-English-speaking Russian.

The British sallied out from Maiden, Ontario, with only rations for two days aboard and fitted with guns dismantled from the fort nearby. Perry hoisted the flag he had made, worded, “Don't give up the ship,” and the battle was joined, each ship lighting its opposite number. The first gun was fired at 11:45 am on May 10, 1813. By 2 pm the flagship *Lawrence* had no gun that would fire. Perry took down the flag, rowed himself and his young brother to the *Niagara* which far to windward was intact and had received only one hit. Ordering *Niagara's* Commander to round up all the ships, Commodore Perry took the *Niagara* himself, hoisted his flag, raced to the British men-o-war who were afoul one another, and in 15 minutes the British conceded defeat. At once, on the badly mauled *Lawrence* with only 27 men able to fight, the Stars and Stripes which had been “struck” was rapidly hoisted in victory.

Joshua Crosby of Orleans was aboard the *Niagara* and in at the last victorious moment when America won with finality her freedom of the seas from Britain.

Crosby returned to further service on the *Constitution*. When the war ended in 1815, he came back to coastal voyages in trade as Mate and Captain.

In 1839 when the first Three Lights were erected on Eastham's Nauset shore, Joshua Crosby became Keeper of those Lights. When pensions were granted to the Veterans of the War of 1812, Joshua Crosby retired to his snug home overlooking the Atlantic where his long years of service had been spent.