

Another War Hero, Joshua Crosby



USS Constitution vs HMS Guerriere. Painting attributed to Thomas Birch

In the famous battle between the *USS Constitution* and *HMS Guerriere* off the coast of Massachusetts on August 19, 1812, Joshua Crosby of Orleans was aboard “Old Ironsides” as a gun captain. It is said that in the face of withering return fire in a broadside duel, Crosby and his crew kept their cannon trained on the enemy ship’s mizzenmast and fired the crucial crippling shot that blasted the mast overboard, leading to the enemy’s surrender within a half hour. This smashing sea victory early in the war did much to bolster America’s sagging morale.

A few months later, Crosby again took part in another action when *Constitution* engaged and captured the 38-gun *HMS Java*. When the *Constitution* went into overhaul, Crosby joined Commodore Oliver Hazard Perry on Lake Erie and again, on September 10, 1813, took part in a critical battle that helped turn the tide of war in favor of the United States. Crosby returned to the *Constitution* when she put to sea again in December, 1814, slipping the British blockade, and he took part in the capture of two more British warships before news arrived that the war had ended.

Joshua Crosby was 13 when he first went to sea, on a pink-stern schooner to fish Georges Bank, 80 miles southeast of Orleans. From there until the war of 1812, he spent his life at sea, first on long whaling voyages, then aboard coastal trading schooners. After the war, he sailed aboard both overseas and coastal ships for another 2 years, ending up as captain of small coasters. When he retired from the sea at age 60, he was appointed keeper of the newly-built “Three Sisters” lighthouses where he continued for another 16 years, then retired again, this time to farming, at his home on Tonset Road, Orleans, where he died December 10, 1861, age 82.