

ORLEANS' HERO — GUNNER CROSBY — Died in Weeset 100 years ago

By Albert Snow

Tuesday, Dec. 10, 1861 Capt. Joshua Crosby III, aged 82 yr. 11 mos., died at his Weeset home facing Weeset Road, - (now profaned Tonset Road, — since the 1944 name change.) He was born nearby in Weeset, 1779, 3 years before the end of the Revolution. Father, Joshua II and mother was Thankful Cole.

Year 1792 Joshua III, was 13 and considered self-supporting. He went a' fishing out of Nauset in pink-stern schooners to fish nearby Georges Bank, 80 miles to the SE. Later he went a' whalin'. Next, in coastal trading schooners out of Boston, Salem. Before Pres., Jefferson's embargo of 1807, Joshua returned to Weeset, marrying Sarah Freeman, daughter of near neighbor Deacon Abner Freeman, of Tonset Point.

After the honeymoon, Joshua rejoined his ship, continuing in the same overseas trade, with an occasional return during the next 7 years to visit his wife and growing family. Arriving Chesapeake Bay from Mediterranean, in Brig *Leonard*, June 1812, his vessel was ordered laid up and crew paid off for war with England had come on the 18th.

U. S. Frigate *Constitution*, 44 guns, was in Chesapeake readying for sea before probable British blockade of the bay should bottle her up. Mate and sea merchant ship gunner, Joshua now 33, presented himself aboard her for enlistment. Capt. Isaac Hull (1773—1843), born on a Connecticut farm. Naval Apprentice at 14, Lieut-Captain of U. S. Naval Brig *Argus* at 19, that helped defeat Barbary Pirates in our war with Tripoli, was impressed with Crosby. He accepted his enlistment in rating of gun captain, detailing him to command a spar-deck carronade, on her starboard quarter.

Constitution cleared Chesapeake 14 July, toward Boston. Aug. 2, in advance of expected orders to remain in Boston, Capt. Hull, spoiling for a victory, sailed to the Eastward to raid enemy commerce off Nova Scotia. What the nation desperately needed in that darkening time was a smashing sea victory to boost sagging moral. But he realized that if he met defeat, he would likely be hanged or shot by Court Martial, for sailing without orders.

Afternoon Aug. 19, when 450 sea miles SE of Halifax, and 750 miles N 80 # of Cape Cod, Capt. Hull sighted, determined to engage British Frigate *Guerriere*, 38 guns, Capt. John Darces, R. N.. By 6 pm, with both frigates running before the wind, yards squared, Capt. Hull had *Guerriere* abeam to starboard in just the position he wanted to begin heavy broadside firing at close range.

Meantime, starboard gun—captain Joshua and crew, kept their gun continuously trained upon *Guerriere's* mizzen-mast. After 15 minutes, *Guerriere's* mizzen-mast was hit squarely, falling overboard. Crosby always asserted his 24 lb shot scored the lucky hit but in the confusion this was overlooked. It was high history. He emerged just one of the little people whose place in the history books either falls into the small, neglected footnotes, or oblivion.

But in one glass (½ hour) the combat was over, *Guerriere* was helpless, wounded Capt. Darces surrendered aboard *Constitution* to Capt. Hull, and the U. S. navy became a first class sea power.

Gunner Crosby remained on *Constitution*, leaving Boston Oct. 26 under Capt. Bainbridge, returning Boston Feb. 27, 1813, after taking *HMS Java*, 38 guns.

During a year's overhaul in Boston, Crosby was sent to Great Lakes joining Commodore Oliver Hazard Perry (A Freeman, Sandwich descendant) aboard flagship *Lawrence*, 20 guns, which helped defeat the British in Lake Erie, Sept. 10, 1813.

Again returning to *Constitution* she sailed Dec. 17, 1814, under Capt. Stewart. On that cruise they took *HMS Levant* and *Cyane*. Arriving Puerto Rico, they got word that peace had been signed 24, Dec. 1814, just 7 days after their Boston departure, but news travelled slowly in those days.

May 15, 1814, *Constitution* returned NY, where Crosby's enlistment expired soon afterward.

For years thereafter, Crosby still followed the sea as mate in vessels of the overseas and coastal trade, becoming Captain of small coasters.

During 1839, he was appointed keeper of newly built Nauset's 3 lights, until relieved years later by Capt. Mike Collins. In 1855 Capt. Crosby, now 76, retired to farming in Weeset.

In old age, a trim spare man, a bit hunched when at ease, he could yet give the old spine a naval snap to assert dignity. His steely-gray-blue eyes were fiery and penetrating. High forehead, long straight nose, ears pierced for tiny gold earrings, he dressed in the olden time style with navel exactitude and bearing. No jowls, no double chin, the embodiment of "Iron men in wooden ships." he was articulate and talked with his hands "Mediterranean style", said Capt. Caleb Hayden of Weeset, who remembered Capt. Joshua very well up to 1861, when Capt. Caleb, mariner, enlisted for the Civil War.

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