



U.S. Coast Guard History Program

Surveyor, 1807

Baltimore, Maryland
Master Samuel Travis



"Capture of the [revenue cutter] SURVEYOR, 12 June 1813"; A watercolor by Irwin John Bevan; from the Mariners' Museum Bailey collection (QW 328). The cutter is incorrectly portrayed as flying the national ensign when in fact, as per Treasury Department regulations, it flew the Revenue ensign (as all cutters did). Courtesy of the Mariners' Museum.

One who surveys; a professional who is concerned with the official inspection of something for purposes of measurement and valuation.

Builder: Robert Parsons, Baltimore, MD

Rig: Schooner

Length: 68'
Beam: 19'
Draft: 6'
Displacement: 75 tons
Cost:
Commissioned: 1807
Disposition: Captured by the British, 1813
Complement: 25
Armament: 6 x 6-pounders

Cutter History:

Cutter: *Surveyor* was built in Baltimore by Robert Parsons and commissioned in September 1807. According to records, the cutter measured sixty-eight feet in length, had a beam of nineteen feet across and drew approximately six feet. The vessel carried a crew of up to twenty-five and an armament of six six-pound cannon. A large British boarding party captured *Surveyor* on June 12, 1813. The former cutter served for a time with the Royal Navy, but its fate is not known.

Master: On December 30, 1811, Samuel Travis received a commission as a revenue cutter master for the Commonwealth of Virginia and took command of the cutter *Surveyor*. On August 27, 1807, Travis had been commissioned a 1st mate for Virginia, and began serving after *Surveyor's* commissioning. As master, his officers included John Hebb, first mate; William Phippen, second mate; and William L. Travis, third mate. In the evening of June 12, 1813, a large armed boarding party from the British frigate HMS *Narcissus* captured *Surveyor*, taking Travis and most of his crew as prisoners. On August 7, 1813, Travis returned to Norfolk, Virginia, after the Royal Navy paroled him at Washington, North Carolina. There is no record of him serving as a revenue cutter master thereafter.

War of 1812 Events and Operations:

June 18, 1812. President James Madison signs a declaration of war and the War of 1812 officially begins. The congressional authorization states, "*that the President of the United States is hereby authorized to use the whole land and naval force of the United States . . . against the vessels, goods, and effects of the government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, and the subjects thereof.*"

June 18, 1812. Treasury Secretary Albert Gallatin sends a circular to all customs collectors, writing only the sentence: "*Sir, I hasten to inform you that War was this day declared against Great Britain*". In a separate circular, Gallatin orders the news dispatched to U.S. naval vessels by revenue cutters stationed at

Savannah; Norfolk; Charleston; New York; Portsmouth, New Hampshire; Wilmington, North Carolina; and Wilmington, Delaware.

July 4, 1812. According to only one source, *Surveyor* captures a British brig bound from Jamaica (reported in *Niles Weekly Register*, July 4, 1812).

June 12, 1813. *Surveyor* captured by four barges from frigate HMS *Narcissus* (32). Anchored off of Gloucester Point, near Yorktown, Virginia, Travis posted a picket boat and installed boarding nets. At about midnight on the evening of June 12, barges carrying a party of over fifty British officers and men approached through the evening haze with muffled oars. They managed to close to within 150 yards of the cutter before the picket boat detected them and fired a warning shot. The barges proved too close for *Surveyor's* carronades and the British boarding party gained the deck of the cutter. Armed with two muskets each, the *Surveyor's* crew of fifteen fought stubbornly, killing three attackers and wounding seven more; however, the British force overwhelmed the crew and captured the cutter. The lieutenant in charge of the attacking flotilla returned Travis's sword, commending him for the valiant defense of his ship in the face of overwhelming enemy forces: "*Your gallant and desperate attempt to defend your vessel against more than double your number excited such admiration on the part of your opponents as I have seldom witnessed, and induced me to return you the sword you had so ably used...I am at loss which to admire most, the previous arrangement on board the Surveyor or the determined manner in which her deck was disputed inch-by-inch.*"

June 18, 1813. In an interview with a correspondent, while held on board the frigate HMS *Junon*, Samuel Travis provided the following after action report: "*Captain Travis on the night of the 12th inst had anchored off Gloucester point: the night being hazy and knowing the enemy's squadron continued in the bay, he sent a guard boat for the purpose of preventing surprise. About 12 o'clock at the distance of 150 yards, he discovered the enemy approaching. The guard boat had been cut off, and compelled to fly to Gloucester shore.-Finding it impossible to make his guns bear with effect, and, to render it a dear bought victory to the enemy, he provided his men with two muskets each, and directed them to lay close until they approached to within pistol shot, when he would give them the word to fire.*"

June 19, 1813. The Baltimore customs collector writes that *Surveyor* "*was an old vessel, scarcely worth repairing. Carried 6 guns of small calibre, and probably had about 15 men and boys on board when captured.*"

June 20, 1813. Frigate HMS *Junon* (44) attacked by a fleet of navy gunboats defending Norfolk, Virginia. Former *Surveyor* master, Samuel Travis, is held as a prisoner on the deck of *Junon* and witnesses the action as the British frigate drives off the gunboats.

June 21, 1813. William Jones, Acting Secretary of the Treasury (as well as Secretary of the Navy), writes the Baltimore customs collector, regarding *Surveyor's* officers and crew, *"that as a Revenue Cutter can be of no use in the waters of the Chesapeake, during the continuance of the present state of things [close British blockade], it will be proper for you to inform the officers and crew of the "Surveyor" that they are to consider themselves as being no longer in the service of the United States."*

June 25, 1813. The British fleet lands troops at Hampton, Virginia, and sacks the city. The British use the captured cutter ex-*Surveyor* to help cover the landings and take the city.

August 7, 1813. Captain Samuel Travis returns to Norfolk, Virginia, after the Royal Navy paroles him at Washington, North Carolina.

August 8, 1814. Peace negotiations between the United States and Great Britain begin in Ghent, Belgium.

December 24, 1814. Peace treaty (Treaty of Ghent) signed between representatives of the United States and Great Britain at a ceremony in Ghent, Belgium.

January 4, 1815. In response to the destructive effects of the war on commerce, New England delegates to the Hartford Convention claim that *"Commerce, the vital spring of New England's prosperity, was annihilated. Embargoes, restrictions, and rapacity of revenue officers, had completed its destruction."*

January 8, 1815. Americans defeat a British army in the Battle of New Orleans in the last major land engagement of the war.

February 11, 1815. Under the white flag, HMS *Favorite* (18) delivers the peace treaty, Treaty of Ghent, to New York City.

February 16, 1815. President Madison signs Treaty of Ghent officially ending the War of 1812.

February 25, 1815. Treasury Secretary Alexander J. Dallas issues a circular to all customs collectors regarding future policy in light of the conclusion of the war. In the two-page circular, he instructs, *"[cutter] officers and men must be recommended for their vigilance, activity, skill and good conduct."* Dallas later directs that *"Smuggling, in every form, must be prevented, or punished. And if it be not prevented, the officers of the customs, according to their respective duties and stations, will be held answerable to prove, that there was no want of vigilance on their part."* In the final paragraph, Dallas lists other duties to be carried out by the customs officials, hence their respective cutters, including *"immediate measures will be taken, for restoring the light-houses, piers, buoys,*

and beacons, within your district and jurisdiction, to the state in which they were before the war”.

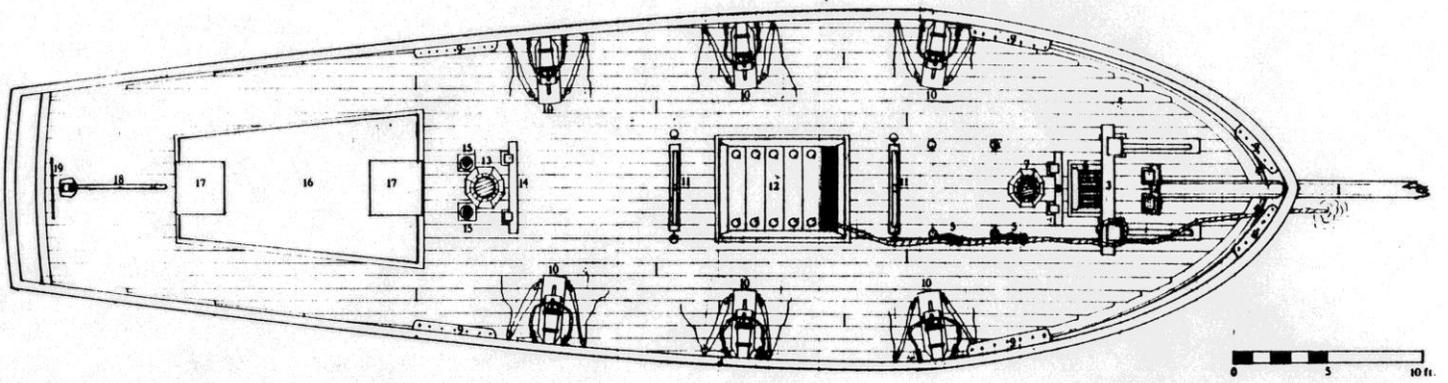
March 3, 1815. Congress repeals “*the acts prohibiting the entrance of foreign vessels into the waters of the United States*”, thereby repealing elements of the Non-Intercourse and Non-Importation acts.

May 30, 1815. Treasury Secretary Alexander Dallas writes the New York customs collector about building one or more schooner-rigged cutters to replace those lost in the war.

Images:



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Deck plan of the Revenue Cutter *Surveyor*.

Drawn by Dr. John Tilley.



The Revenue Cutter *Surveyor*. A painting by George N. Payne. The artist donated the painting to the Coast Guard in 1990 "in honor of its 200th Anniversary."

Sources:

Cutter History File, Coast Guard Historian's Office.

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