



Legare, 1844

Hugh Swinton Legare the 16th Attorney General of the United States. Born in Charleston, South Carolina, on January 2, 1797, he graduated from the College of South Carolina in 1814. For the next three years he studied law, then traveled in Europe, studying French in Paris, Roman law, philosophy, math and chemistry in Edinborough. Upon his return to South Carolina in 1820, he was elected to the South Carolina State Legislature. He served until 1822, and from 1824 to 1830 when he was elected State attorney general. In 1832, he was Charge d'Affaires at Brussels. Upon his return to the United States, he was elected to Congress. He served from 1837 until 1839. President Tyler appointed him Attorney General of the United States in 1841. He died in Boston, Massachusetts, on June 20, 1843, while attending ceremonies at the unveiling of the Bunker Hill Monument.

TYPE/RIG/CLASS: Three-masted barquentine

BUILDER: R. & GL Schuyler, NY

DATES OF SERVICE: 1844-1847

DISPOSITION: To CS 12 Nov 1847

DISPLACEMENT: 400 tons

LENGTH: 160 feet

BEAM: 24 feet

DRAFT: 9 feet, 3 inches to 9 feet, 9 inches

PROPULSION: Propeller

MACHINERY: Jproz back-acting, 24-inch diameter x 36-inch stroke

COMPLEMENT: 58 (Legare)

ARMAMENT: 1 long 18-pdr; one 9-pdr, one 12-pdr, two 4-pdrs

Cutter History:

In the 1830s and 1840s the sea services were searching for an alternative to the cumbersome and highly exposed side paddle wheels. John Ericsson and Richard Loper had patented screw propellers, and Navy Lieutenant William Hunter proposed horizontally mounted paddle wheels, which rotated merry-go-round style within the hull, below the waterline. Apertures in the hull sides allowed the paddles to act on the surrounding waters. Hunter had succeeded in interesting the Navy in his idea, and the Revenue Service followed suit. In all, eight steamers were begun for the Revenue Service, four with Hunter's system (*Bibb*, *Dallas*, *McLane*, and *Spencer*), two with Ericsson's (*Jefferson*, *Legare*), and two paddle-wheel vessels (*Polk*, *Walker*). All eight were also built of iron – a very early use of that metal. Steam vessels were thought to be of particular use in the narrow waterways of the southern coasts, in pursuit of smugglers.

All eight vessels provided unmitigated failures. Lieutenant Hunter had not taken into full account the waste of power when the paddles encountered and worked against water entering the paddle-wheel casings. In addition, the vessels were coal hungry (the Navy's three Hunter's wheel vessels had the same problem).

The machinery of Ericsson's vessels proved overly complicated, and the side-wheel ships suffered from delays, lack of iron, faulty plans, and bad weather. Originally slated to cost \$50,000 each, over \$2 million was eventually spent in original construction and the massive modifications required subsequently in attempts to rectify the problems.

The eight vessels had extremely short service lives. Only the Coast Survey seemed to profit from the debacle, receiving five of the ships when they were cast off by the Revenue Service. Two became lightships and one was converted into a barque.

Cutter History:

Named after Hugh S. Legare, attorney general under Tyler, *Legare* was built by R. and G. L. Schuyler of New York in 1843. She had Ericsson's machinery and two six-bladed screws, and measured 364 12/95 tons (CH). She displaced 360 tons and when her machinery was running correctly she could readily make nine knots. She was placed in service May 1844, the first of this class of cutter to enter service, under the command of Captain H. B. Nones, USRM, a well-known officer who also carried the Revenue Cutter *Forward* heroically into action in several Mexican War battles.

During extensive trials conducted with the Hunter's wheel vessel the *Spencer*, she proved to be significantly more economical, although when in service at Key West, Florida, her boilers leaked 500 gallons an hour. Ericsson's propellers were replaced by Loper's, and in May of 1846 she went to the Gulf during the War with Mexico, one of eleven revenue cutters assigned to cooperate with the Army and Navy during the Mexican War, where she saw service as a dispatch boat. It assisted in towing, blockading, and transporting troops and ammunition to various ports in the Gulf of Mexico. The leaks in her boilers continued, however, and after two months she returned to Norfolk.

She went to the Coast Survey on 12 November 1847 and was converted to a lightship after ten years of service in the Survey.

Sources:

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