



U.S. Coast Guard History Program

Massachusetts, 1801

Boston, Massachusetts

Masters John Foster Williams & Samuel Russell Trevett

A state of the northeast United States. It was admitted as one of the original Thirteen Colonies in 1788. The first European settlement was made by the Pilgrims of the *Mayflower* in 1620. Governed by the Massachusetts Bay Company from 1629 until 1684, the colony was a leader in the move for independence from Great Britain and the site of the first battles of the Revolutionary War in 1775.

Builder: Boston, MA

Rig: Topsail schooner

Length: 58'

Beam: 18'

Draft: 10'

Displacement: 62 tons

Cost:

Commissioned: 1801

Disposition: Decommissioned 1816

Complement:

Armament:

Cutter History:

Cutter: *Massachusetts* was built in Boston and commissioned in 1801. It displaced approximately sixty-two tons; measured fifty-eight feet in length with a nearly eighteen-foot beam; and drew about ten feet. This cutter was the third to bear the name "Massachusetts" and served out of Boston throughout the War of 1812. It was decommissioned and exchanged for the new cutter *Search* in Newport, Rhode Island, on July 23, 1816.

Masters: John Foster Williams became a master for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts on December 4, 1791. On June 24, 1814, at seventy years of age, Williams died of natural causes while still in command of cutter

Massachusetts. At the opening of the War of 1812, Williams' officers included Nathaniel Nichols, first mate; Ezekiel Lincoln, second mate; and Barnabas Hopkins, third mate (who was replaced as third mate by Jacob Williams on December 22, 1813). On July 18, 1814, Samuel Russell Trevett received his commission as revenue cutter master for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts; and, on July 21, 1814, Trevett assumed command of cutter *Massachusetts*. He later commanded Boston cutters *Search* and *Hamilton* before his death in January 1832.

War of 1812 Events and Operations:

June 10, 1812. *Massachusetts* (John Foster Williams) seizes fishing boat *Orange of Wiscasset* near Boston carrying a cargo of nearly \$8,000 worth of illegal British goods.

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.

June 18, 1812. Treasury Secretary Albert Gallatin orders Boston revenue cutter *Massachusetts* (John Foster Williams) dispatched to the Passamaquoddy District of Maine, near the border with Canada, to notify locals of the declaration of war with Great Britain. The Passamaquoddy area of Maine experienced significant smuggling of British goods from Canada by American vessels prior to the war.

December 28, 1812. In response to a letter from the Boston Customs Collector, Treasury Secretary Albert Gallatin writes, "*A Revenue Cutter cannot be expressly fitted and employed for the purpose of cruising against an enemy except under the 98th Section of the collection law in which case the Cutter must be placed under the direction of the Secretary of the Navy.*"

June 24, 1814. John Foster Williams, seventy years of age, dies of natural causes at Boston, Massachusetts, while still in command of cutter *Massachusetts*.

August 4, 1814. *Massachusetts* (Samuel Russell Trevett) conveys the Boston customs collector and surveyor to call on the Dutch minister on board the Dutch

warship *Ajax*, anchored in Boston Harbor. After the men returned to the cutter, *Massachusetts* fired a salute in recognition of the Dutch dignitary.

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

December 24, 1814. Treasury Secretary Alexander Dallas informs the New Bedford (Massachusetts) customs collector that ships from his port have been illegally provisioning the Royal Navy at Tarpaulin Cove, in Vineyard Sound. Dallas advises the collector “*to take decisive measures upon the advice of the District Attorney for preventing every kind of illicit intercourse with the Enemy.*”

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 27, 1815. *Massachusetts* (Samuel R. Trevett) delivers Major Samuel D. Harris, U.S. Army, to Castine, Maine, to enforce peace treaty obligations on the local populace.

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.

June 22, 1815. *Massachusetts* (Samuel R. Trevett) resumes regular revenue patrols along the Maine Coast.

Sources:

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