



Morris, 1848

The cutter *Morris* was named for Robert Morris, who was born in Liverpool, England, 20 January 1734. He emigrated to Maryland in 1747. The next year he moved to Philadelphia where, after brief schooling, he entered the service of the Willings, shipping merchants. Rising to partnership in 1754, Morris rapidly attained great power and influence in the commercial and political life of America. Appointed to the Pennsylvania Committee of Safety in June 1775, he was extremely active, arming both Pennsylvanian and Continental forces. Joining the Continental Congress in November 1776, he was a signer of the Declaration of Independence.

Morris' key role in the financial affairs of the new nation led to his appointment as Superintendent of Finance in May 1781 and Agent of Marine that September. His extraordinary skill in both offices greatly contributed to American success in the Revolution. A delegate to the Constitutional Convention, Morris served in the U.S. Senate 1789-1795, but declined to stand for reelection. He continued his leadership in business and banking until impoverished when values of his extensive land holdings collapsed. Morris died in Philadelphia 5 May 1806.

Builder: Brown & Cottrell, Baltimore, Maryland

Length: 102' (deck)

Beam: 23'

Draft: 9' 7"

Displacement: 155 tons

Cost: \$

Commissioned: 26 April 1847 (launched)

Decommissioned: 10 December 1868 (sold)

Disposition: Sold

Rig: Topsail schooner

Machinery: None

Complement:

Armament: 1 x 32-pounder pivot-mounted cannon; 1 x brass 12-pound howitzer; 12 Maynard rifles; 12 smooth bore muskets; 12 pistols; 19 cutlasses; 11 boarding pikes; 18 battle axes (1861).

Cutter History:

On October 20, 1848, Revenue Captain Ezekeil Jones was ordered to superintend the construction of a new vessel that was to be built under contract by John S. Brown, and to be built at Baltimore, Maryland. This vessel was the second Revenue cutter to carry the name *Morris*. She was designed as one of four Campbell-class cutters that entered service in 1849. She was built of white and yellow pine, white and live oak, locust, cedar, and mahogany. Her bottom was sheathed in copper with copper fastenings with hatches and mast combings of mahogany. She had a full poop deck, flush with the main rail, and a cockpit aft. The *Morris* was launched on April 26, 1847, and ordered to Portland, Maine, under Revenue Captain Green Walden the following day.

She was temporarily laid up at New York from January 16, 1850, until May 26, 1851, when she sailed to Boston, Massachusetts, arriving on June 11th. During November, 1853, she underwent repairs at the Boston Navy Yard. On January 14, 1854, along with five other Revenue cutters, the *Morris* was sent in search of the steamer *San Francisco*, which was never found.

The *Morris* was placed at the disposal of U.S. Marshall Freeman Watson from May 29 to June 10, 1854, to assist in returning a fugitive slave to his owner under the auspices of the 1850 Fugitive Slave Act. Transcripts of the correspondence regarding this event follow (as given in the Record of Movements):

May 29, 1854, letter from C.H. Peaslee, Collector of Customs at Boston to Freeman Watson, U.S. Marshall: "The Revenue Cutter MORRIS is hereby placed at your disposal, should her services be required in executing the laws of the United States. On being advised of your desire in the premises, I will immediately direct Captain [John] Whitcomb, her commander, to report to you for instructions."

May 29 1854, letter from U.S. Marshall Watson to Boston Collector Peaslee: "Accept my thanks for your offer placing the Revenue Cutter at my disposal. I should wish that she might be kept in readiness for immediate use and I will advise you when wanted. Please ask Captain Whitcomb to report to me at once.

May 29, 1854, letter from Deputy Collector to Captain Whitcomb: "The Revenue Cutter MORRIS having been placed at the service of the Marshal of the United States, for this district, you are hereby ordered to report forthwith to him for instructions."

June 1, 1854, letter (persons to and from not given): "I have duly received your letter of the 30th ultimo, and entirely approve of your course in placing the Cutter MORRIS at the disposal of the Marshal for the purpose, I conclude, of his removing the fugitive Slave Anthony Burns if remanded out of danger and if necessary to the place from which he escaped."

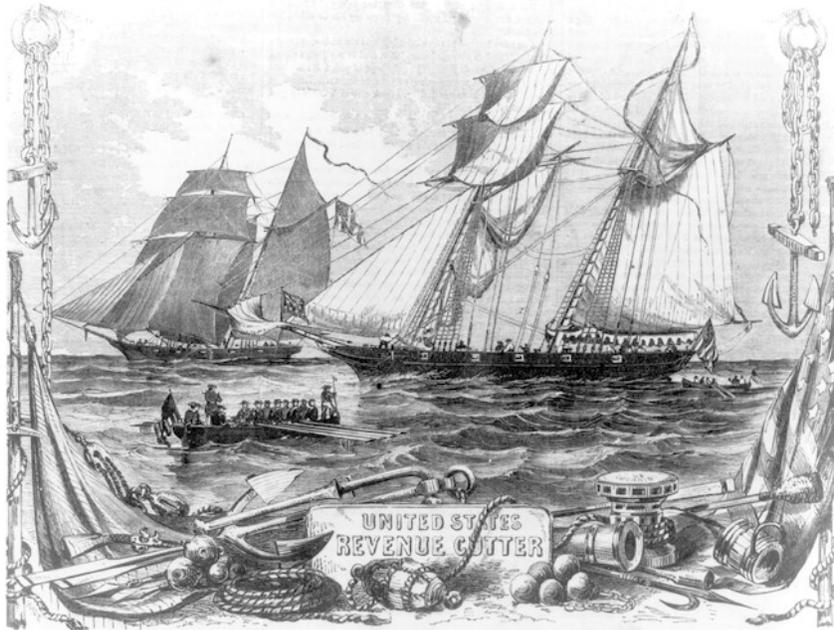
June 10, 1854, letter from Captain Whitcomb to Secretary of the Treasury: "I have the honor to inform you that in obedience to the order of the Collector of Customs at Boston, placing me under the orders of the U.S. Marshal, and obedience to his verbal instructions, I arrived this day at Norfolk, with the U.S. Deputy Marshal and four assistants on board, with their charge - the fugitive, Anthony Burns. The owner of the slave, Col. Suttle, and his friend Mr. Brent, sailed from Boston with me, but pressing engagements requiring their presence at home, I put them off at Sandy Hook on board a vessel bound into New York."

On October 11, 1854, the *Morris* underwent extensive repairs costing \$8,808.83, and on June 13, 1860, costing \$5,000. She saw extensive service during the Civil War patrolling for Confederate privateers off the New England coast, including one rather famous incident in July, 1861. On July 12, 1861, a telegram was delivered to Revenue Captain John Whitcomb, commanding the *Morris*. The telegram stated that the Confederate privateer brig *Jefferson Davis* was cruising in the North Atlantic and that the *Morris* was to sail in search of it. The *Jefferson Davis* had captured a number of Union merchant vessels and several gunboats were sent to end the privateer's depredations. With the Civil War just three months old, *Morris* lay in the Charleston Navy Yard in Boston being outfitted for wartime service. Upon receiving the telegram, Whitcomb readied his ship for sea and stood down the harbor at 8:30 p.m.

On the morning of July 16, sailing in a southeasterly direction, *Morris* began searching for the privateer. About 200 miles east of New York lookouts aboard the cutter spied a sail and proceeded in that direction. The vessel proved to be the merchant ship *Benjamin Adams*, carrying 650 Scottish and Irish immigrants from Liverpool to New York. The cutter *Morris* dispatched a boarding team to inspect the merchantman and the team found no irregularities and so let the merchantman continue to New York. (This incident was depicted in a painting by artist Gil Cohen for the Coast Guard Art Program; see image below.) *Morris* never located the *Jefferson Davis*, which had escaped to Florida by mid-August.

On March 31, 1865, she was repaired for \$10,807.07. On August 14, 1866, she sailed from New York and arrived at Mobile on October 15th. On October 22, 1868, she sailed from Mobile and arrived in Baltimore on November 30th.

She was put up for sale on December 10, 1868, at Baltimore.



"U.S.R.C. Morris."
Engraving from *Ballou's Pictorial*, 20 January 1855.
Naval Historical Center image #NH 45731.



"The Revenue Cutter *Morris* prepares to board the passenger ship *Benjamin Adams* on July 16, 1861."
Painting by Gil Cohen.

Sources:

Cutter History File.

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