

*U.S. Coast Guard History Program*

# Surveyor, 1807



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One who surveys.

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Builder: Robert Parsons, Baltimore, Maryland

Length: 68'

Beam: 19' 6"

Draft: 8'

Displacement: 75 tons

Rig: Schooner

Cost: ?

Launched: ?

Commissioned: September, 1807

Decommissioned: N/A

Disposition: Captured by the Royal Navy, 12 June 1813

Complement: 25

Armament: Six 6-pounders

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### History:

The *Surveyor* was built as a replacement for the cutter *Dolly* by Robert Parsons of Baltimore, Maryland. She was stationed at Baltimore and may have been the first revenue cutter based in this port as up to this time the Norfolk, Virginia-based cutters were responsible for covering the Baltimore area. She spent her initial years attempting to enforce President Thomas Jefferson's Embargo Act of 1807.

The *Surveyor*, under the command of Captain Francis Bright, took as a prize the "fine new" schooner *Martha and Susan*, carrying a cargo of flour, off Great Choptank and took her into Norfolk, in January of 1809. The schooner, under the command of a Captain Betts, had "no clearance papers."

She captured a French privateer on 10 June 1810 and seized a "valuable British ship from Jamaica" in July of 1812, one month after the U.S. declared war on Great Britain. The following year, on 12 June 1813, while under the command of Captain Samuel Travis, *Surveyor* was captured by a British boarding party. The official history of the Revenue Cutter Service noted:

"But the British were in U.S. waters in force, and the *Eagle* was not the only cutter to be overtaken by heavy odds. The *Madison* was lost to the enemy in 1812, and the *Surveyor* was captured one rainy night the following year, as she lay anchored in the York River. Manned by only 15 men, she was attacked by a boarding party of 50 Englishmen in boats from His Majesty's frigate *Narcissus*, Lieutenant John Crierie, R.N. The boarders approached with muffled oars, from such an angle that Captain Samuel Travis, in the *Surveyor*, was unable to bring his guns to bear. He therefore gave his men two muskets each and bade them hold their fire until command. No sign or sound went up from the *Surveyor* to show that the attackers had been observed until the Englishmen were within pistol range; then with a whoop the cutter men cut loose their muskets and stood by to repel boarders. They had little time to wait, it seems, for 'with the rattling volley came the cheers of the attacking party, who dashed alongside despite the leaden missiles, and a desperate hand-to-hand conflict ensued on the deck of the *Surveyor*. Although outnumbered and surrounded by the enemy, the crew did not flinch, contesting the deck with stubborn courage in response to ringing appeals from Captain Travis, who did not surrender his vessel until further resistance would have resulted in useless and wanton shedding of blood."

In this brief and bloody struggle, five cutter men were wounded; seven British were wounded and three killed. The following day, Crierie returned Travis' sword with a note whose sentiment impresses one as much with Crierie's gallantry as with Travis' own:

*Sir:*

*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, in testimony of mine.*

*Our poor fellows have severely suffered, occasioned chiefly, if not solely, by the precaution you had taken to prevent surprise. In short, I am at a loss which to admire most—the previous arrangement on board the Surveyor, or the determined manner in which the deck was disputed inch by inch.*

*You have my most sincere wishes for the immediate parole and speedy exchange of yourself and brave crew.*

*I am, Sir, with much respect,  
Your most obedient servant,*

*John*

*Crerie*

She was then taken in service by the Royal Navy for use on the Chesapeake. Her ultimate fate is unknown.

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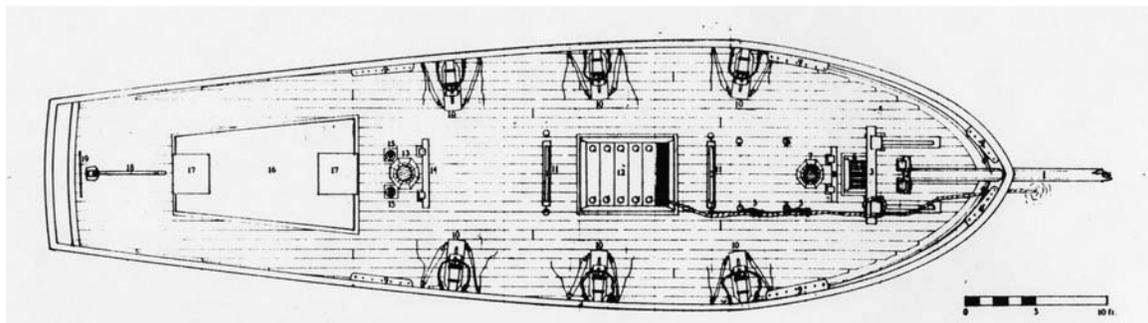
#### Images:



**"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.**



**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."**



**Deck plan of the Revenue Cutter *Surveyor*.**

**Drawn by Dr. John Tilley.**

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**Sources:**

Cutter History File, Coast Guard Historian's Office.

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