

## Asa Curtis, Master Gunner U.S. Navy 1794-1858



The Naval Historical Center website (<http://www.history.navy.mil/library/manuscript/curtis.htm>) contains 25 items related to Asa Curtis, a seaman and gunner who served with distinction throughout a 46-year career in the U.S. Navy.

Asa was born to Abel and Desire Curtis in either Scituate, MA or Bucksport, ME on March 9, 1793. With his six siblings, Asa was the sixth generation of the 1638 Thomas Curtis of Scituate line; thus, Asa<sup>6</sup>, Abel<sup>5</sup>, Elijah<sup>4</sup>, Benjamin<sup>3</sup>, Samuel<sup>2</sup>, Thomas<sup>1</sup>. Asa's navy records state that he was from Buxton, Maine.

Asa entered into service as a seaman and joined the *USS Constitution* in May 1812 at the Washington Navy Yard. He saw action against the British in the War of 1812 while onboard the *Constitution*. He was formally appointed a gunner by President James Monroe in 1825. Michael Clear, Sailing Master and Asa's shipmate wrote a Letter of Merit for Asa, dated 1845 - "*Mr. Asa Curtis was shipmates with me on board the U.S. Frigate Constitution*

*during the last war at the capture of the British Frigates Guerruere and Java and during the hottest of the fight with the Java, he descended the Foretop Gallant stay to rebend the Flying Gib Halyards which had been shot away and, I believe, by that act of his, greatly tended by keeping head sail in the ship capturing the enemy."*

Asa married Ann \_\_\_?\_\_\_ (born 1805 PA) on August 13, 1822. They had six children: William Bainbridge (b. 1825), Anna Jane (b. 1827), Susan (b. 1831), George Washington (b. 1833), Lucy Cushing (b. 1836) and James Maurice (b. 1841).

Up until 1838, Asa also served aboard the *USS Independence*, the *USS Columbus* and the *USS Delaware*, all ships of the line. Asa was a Gunner's Mate on the *Independence* when Commodore Bainbridge acquired concessions from Algiers on piracy in 1815. He served again in the Mediterranean Squadron on *Java* in the late 1820s and aboard *Delaware* in 1830s. In 1838, Asa was assigned to Philadelphia where he was able to spend time with his growing family and to assist in the presentation of the Masters Bill to the US Congress in Washington. By the early 1840's, Asa was back at sea aboard the U.S. Frigate *United States* and he also served with the Pacific Squadron and aboard the *Mississippi* in 1840's.

The Navy's collection contains the last correspondence on Asa, a letter from Captain F. Forrest of the Flag Ship *St. Lawrence* to Secretary of the Navy Isaac Toucey, dated September 13, 1858, informing him of the death of Gunner Asa Curtis Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. The letter stated, in part, "...*He died on the day before yesterday at the Miserecordia Hospital, after a protracted illness of several months. His disease was one of long standing, and during his sickness, he received the utmost care and attention; and the best medical aid, from both on shore, and the Flag Ship. Mr. Curtis was an excellent and faithful officer, and by his strict attention to duty, merited as he received, the approbation of his commanding officer. At the time of his death, he was the senior Gunner in the Navy. He was buried on yesterday, with the honors due his rank, deeply and truly lamented by all, both officers and men...."*

The Surface Navy Association has a nice video on the heroic exploits of Asa Curtis on <http://www.navysna.org/SNA/Awards/HallOfFame/C/Curtis.htm>. The Association also has Asa listed in their Hall of Fame.