

Dana M. Wegner, Query and Response, *The American Neptune* 52, #4 (Fall, 1992): 262-263.

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## Query and Response

Dear Editor:

I would like to take the opportunity to expand and comment upon some of the items submitted as evidence by Evan Randolph in his article "Fouled Anchors? Foul Blow!" in *The American Neptune* 52, no. 2 (Spring 1992).

The 18 December 1851 letter of John Lenthall to Commodore Charles W. Skinner, entirely reprinted in "Fouled Anchors? Foul Blow!" was cited and identically interpreted by proponents of the 1797 origin of the *Constellation* as early as 1961. The full letter was reproduced in manuscript form by Howard Chapelle in *The Constellation Question* (with Leon Polland [Smithsonian Institution Press, 1970], 33-37). The authors of *Fouled Anchors: The Constellation Question Answered*, as well as several readers of "Foul Blow," agreed with Chapelle's view that the letter reflected a subordinate tendering several options to a superior. It was not a statement of intent by constructor Lenthall, who apparently would not decide the fate of the worn frigate until May 1853.

Regarding the January and February 1853 docking plans, which offer important evidence of the hull form of the frigate *Constellation* just prior to her demise, the author of "Foul Blow" postulated that both drawings were independently misdated because he was unable to envision how a pantographic device might be able to measure a hull underwater. Measurements were necessarily made before each dry dock event, and *Fouled Anchors* offered an archival drawing by Charles S. Bruff actually entitled "For taking the shape of ship before docking," found in the Grice Collection, Record Group 45, National Archives, and dated ca. 1817-65. While this exact machine may or may not have been employed on *Constellation*, the drawing confirms that the shapes of ships were taken before docking, and that the technology to accomplish it was available.

"Foul Blow" reproduced the Bruff drawing as Figure 2. It shows a two-dimensional representation of a complicated multiple lever-acting device. In preparing our original report, we reviewed the Bruff drawing with a number of mechanical and naval engineers who agreed that the drawing depicted a workable appliance which could clamp to the keel and probably seek and measure,

regardless of bottom fouling, the distance between the bottom of the false keel and the lower edge of the rabbet. The changing distance reflected the true hog of the *Constellation's* keel. Since the device clamped to the keel and relative measurements were transmitted by graduated rods, the sea state was largely irrelevant to the accuracy of the process.

The transverse section plan dated 11 January 1839, briefly mentioned in "Foul Blow" and attributed to the "Lloyd Olson Collection" (actually Loyd Olsson), was not employed in our study because it was one of the many items deemed likely forged. Allegedly from Record Group 45, the primary copy of this crude sketch was found in the Leon Polland Papers and it is likely Polland inherited that copy from the tainted historical files developed by others and maintained aboard the *Constellation* after she was brought to Baltimore. He specifically chose not to utilize it in his defense of the 1797 origin of the ship. In the late 1960s Polland probably gave a reproduction to Olsson, an excellent researcher employed by the Naval Historical Center.

Like so many other documents allegedly supporting the continuous existence of the *Constellation*, no original could be found in the archives cited for the 1839 transverse sketch, and it had certain characteristics common to the proven and likely forgeries. If nothing more, the report *Fouled Anchors: The Constellation Question Answered* should remind researchers working the subject to be very wary of spurious material. Documentation which has no verifiable provenance and works derived from that documentation should be set aside.

"Foul Blow" also reiterates the use of the 30 December 1840 hold plan of *Constellation* to show that a new bow was installed before that date. The hold plan is tipped-in to the Diary of Daily Transactions at the U.S. Navy Yard, Charlestown, 1 July 1840 - 28 December 1841. Hold plans were regularly pasted in navy yard logs in order to record the placement of weights and its effect on the trim of each vessel before she went to sea. The volume in which appears the 30 December 1840 plan has a number of hold plans for various ships. Each plan has copious notations or, as in the case of *Constellation*, a memorandum following which tabulates the positions and

number of tanks, casks, and kentledge in relation to the meticulously measured trim of the ship. Seen in context, it is readily apparent that the plans, actually diagrams, were executed by a variety of draftsmen and were meant to record the distribution of weights along the centerline of each vessel. The transverse distribution was not as critical, and the outboard perimeter of the hold was irrelevant to the purpose of the drawing.

Comparison with other hold plans in the same series of yard logs in Record Group 71 shows that the shape of the ship's hull was represented by an arbitrary line determined by the draftsman. In this series of logs there is no accurate differentiation of hold perimeter between ship types. Hold plans for sloops of war, frigates, and brigs frequently look alike, and none represents the true hull form of the ship represented. There is no reason to believe that the 30 December 1840 hold plan of *Constellation* depicts hull form any more accurately than others in the same volumes.

Even if the hold plan were an accurate depiction of hull form, it depicts the shape of the hull to the inside of the ceiling. However, the lines plans which the hold plan is claimed to match were drawn to the outside of the frame. The best possible match would be parallel lines, not superimposed lines as shown in the article. "Foul Blow" quoted our continuing view that a hold plan is inappropriate to use as an indicator of hull form.

The *Constellation* controversy has been around for decades. We hope that our report, *Fouled Anchors*, did more than reveal the widespread forgery of documentation supporting the 1797 origin of that worthy ship. It also offered a cogent alternative reinterpretation of the vessel based on significant tangible evidence that was frequently nonverbal in nature. We look forward to an active, non-emotional exchange and discussion in forthcoming issues of *The American Neptune*.

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Dear Editor:

In a recent article entitled "*Fouled Anchors? Foul Blow!*" by Evan Randolph, which appeared in *The American Neptune* 52, no. 2 (Spring 1992), the cart appears to have been set before the horse. Mr. Randolph has used poor historic insight in his article and attempts to indicate that the currently reconstructed *Constellation* now on display in Baltimore harbor represents the initial hull of this vessel as built at Baltimore in 1797, rather than a

vessel that was constructed at Norfolk to entirely different plans designed and drawn by John Lenthall in 1853.

The log of the Gosport (Norfolk) Navy Yard indicates that "the keel of the frigate *Constellation* in ship house (B)" was laid by a work crew on 25 June 1853. Unfortunately, the word *frigate* was used instead of the words *sloop of war* to describe this new vessel being built, though in later log entries the vessel is correctly designated as a sloop of war. The crucial entry is that for 26 August 1854, which reads: "At 15 minutes to 12 N[oon] new sloop of war *Constellation* (emphasis added) was launched from Ship House (B) without any accident." It is apparent, therefore, that the individuals working on this vessel during 1853 realized it was of quite a different form than the old frigate *Constellation* which had been constructed and launched at Baltimore in 1797.

Several contemporary newspaper entries of the 1850s support this conclusion, including an article in *The Monthly Nautical Magazine* published in 1854 that is on file at the Mariners' Museum in Newport News, Virginia. The article provides the following headline and data:

Naval Improvement: The Old and the New Ship  
*Constellation*

<i>Constellation</i>	Old	New
Length between perpendiculars	164'	176'
Beam moulded	40.06'	41'
Hold to gun-deck	19.06'	21'
Length on load-line	162'	176'

These figures indicate that there was quite a big difference in the final appearance of the two vessels. The length between perpendiculars had increased by twelve feet, but the length on the load-line (or water line) indicated that the new vessel was fourteen feet longer at that point, indicating a completely different profile. Also, the increase of 1.94 feet in her hold would have been impossible without major rebuilding.

An excellent paper on the original frigate *Constellation* entitled "USF *Constellation* as She May Have Appeared in the Period 1797 to 1800" by Thomas A. Todd appeared in the *Nautical Research Journal* 31, no. 2 (June 1985): 55-67. This article is well illustrated and contains plans of both the original Baltimore frigate and the Gosport-built sloop of war and indicates the absurdity of the retention of the original frigate's hull for that of the sloop of war.

As Dana Wegner indicated in his volume entitled *Fouled Anchors: The Constellation Question Answered*, the relic on display at Baltimore is indeed a valuable one as it represents the last vessel constructed for the sailing navy of the United States. Unfortunately, the current Baltimore display attempts to reconstruct this vessel into