Form No. 10-300 (Rev. 10-74)

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

FOR NPS USE ONLY
RECEIVED
DATE ENTERED

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

1 NAME

HISTORIC
U.S.S. Constitution

AND/OR COMMON
U.S.S. Constitution; "Old Ironsides"

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER
Boston Naval Shipyard — NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN
Boston (Charlestown) — VICINITY OF

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT
Eighth

STATE
Massachusetts

CODE
025

COUNTY
Suffolk

CODE
025

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE	
__DISTRICT	X PUBLIC	X OCCUPIED	__AGRICULTURE	X MUSEUM
__BUILDING(S)	__PRIVATE	__UNOCCUPIED	__COMMERCIAL	__PARK
__STRUCTURE	__BOTH	__WORK IN PROGRESS	__EDUCATIONAL	__PRIVATE RESIDENCE
__SITE	**PUBLIC ACQUISITION**	**ACCESSIBLE**	__ENTERTAINMENT	__RELIGIOUS
X OBJECT	__IN PROCESS	X YES: RESTRICTED	__GOVERNMENT	__SCIENTIFIC
	__BEING CONSIDERED	__YES: UNRESTRICTED	__INDUSTRIAL	__TRANSPORTATION
		__NO	__MILITARY	__OTHER:

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME
Department of the Navy

STREET & NUMBER
Pentagon Building

CITY, TOWN
Arlington — VICINITY OF

STATE
Virginia

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.
not applicable

STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN

STATE

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE
Historic American Buildings Survey (Commodore's Quarters only)

DATE
1934

X FEDERAL __STATE __COUNTY __LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS
Division of Prints and Photographs, Library of Congress

CITY, TOWN
Washington

STATE
D.C.

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
__EXCELLENT	__DETERIORATED	__UNALTERED	__ORIGINAL SITE not applicable
X GOOD	__RUINS	X ALTERED	__MOVED DATE_____
__FAIR	__UNEXPOSED		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The frigate Constitution, as designed by Joshua Humphreys and built during 1794-97, was longer, broader, and higher out of water than existing ships of her class. She had an over-all length of 204 feet and a length on the load water line of 175 feet. Her beam was 43.6 feet, the depth of her hold was 14.3 feet, and she displaced 2,200 tons. Her best sailing draft was 21 feet forward and 23 feet aft. Her length and stability allowed for a vast spread of canvas (42,710 square feet) and exceptional speed (13+ knots).

The live oak, red cedar, white oak, pitch pine, and locust of which the Constitution was built came from states ranging from Maine to South Carolina and Georgia. Her foremast (198 feet), mainmast (220 feet), and mizzenmast (172 feet, 6 inches) were all of solid white pine. Essential metal fittings--composition castings, composition spikes, and copper bolts--were produced at Boston by Paul Revere.

Constitution's original tonnage was 1,576 tons. Her wooden tanks and casks held 48,000 gallons of fresh water and there was storage room for six month's provisions (including 8,000 gallons of rum) for the ship's crew of 450-500 men. She was heavily ballasted and designed to carry a large supply of powder and shot. The ship's usual armament included 32 24-pound long guns (crew of 6-14; weight 5,600 pounds; effective range 1,200 yards) and 20 32-pound carronades (crew of 4-9; weight 2,200 pounds; effective range 400 yards).

In the course of several rebuildings, 85-90% of Constitution's original material has been replaced. During 1811 general repairs were made and new built-up masts were installed. The 1814 work included increasing the height of the bulwarks and providing additional protection for the spar-deck gun crews. A fairly complete restoration was accomplished at Boston in 1833-35 and extensive repairs were made at Norfolk in 1842-32, Portsmouth in 1856-57, and Philadelphia in 1874-77. During 1906-07 Constitution was again fully restored at Boston: the roof structure (installed while she was in use as a receiving ship) was removed; new masts, spars, and tops were installed; heavy furring was laid over the old spar-deck planking; and dummy 24-pound and 32-pound guns and carriages were placed on board.

Constitution had again deteriorated badly by the time of her 1927-31 restoration: her port was some 11 inches wider than her starboard side; her beams, transverse framing, and deck planking were badly decayed; her keelson, built of live oak 7-3/4 inches thick in 22 to 24 foot lengths, had cracked in two; and her hull structure was so weak that it was feared the two ends might fall off when the ship was moved into drydock. Though her old keel was found to need only minor bracing and some 75% of her old joiner work was repaired and reinstalled, the Constitution was, in effect, totally reconstructed during this period. In all $921,108.49 (better than three times her original cost) was spent to restore the Constitution to her appearance in 1812-14, the period of her greatest activity.

The Constitution is now permanently berthed at the Boston Naval Shipyard where, since April, 1973, she has been undergoing her first full-scale restoration since that of 1927-31. Scheduled for completion about June, 1976, the current project will include installation of new outer hull planking both above and below water (100% and 20% respectively) and new copper sheathing and complete repair of all masts, yards, and rigging.

8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
__PREHISTORIC	__ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	__COMMUNITY PLANNING	__LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	__RELIGION
__1400-1499	__ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	__CONSERVATION	__LAW	__SCIENCE
__1500-1599	__AGRICULTURE	__ECONOMICS	__LITERATURE	__SCULPTURE
__1600-1699	__ARCHITECTURE	__EDUCATION	X MILITARY	__SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
X 1700-1799	__ART	__ENGINEERING	__MUSIC	__THEATER
X 1800-1899	__COMMERCE	__EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	__PHILOSOPHY	__TRANSPORTATION
__1900-	__COMMUNICATIONS	__INDUSTRY	X POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	__OTHER (SPECIFY)
		__INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES 1797 BUILDER/ARCHITECT Joshua Humphreys

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The U.S.S. Constitution, now the oldest commissioned warship in the world, is a stirring symbol of American naval skill and courage in the great age of fighting sail. Built at Boston and launched in 1797, Constitution participated in the undeclared naval war with France (1798-1800), saw action against the Barbary (Algerian) pirates (1803-05), and in the War of 1812 earned lasting fame and the title "Old Ironsides" in spectacular ship-to-ship duels with Great Britain's Royal Navy. Constitution took part in some 40 engagements in all without sustaining a single loss.

When launched, Constitution had an over-all length of 204 feet, a beam of 43.6 feet, a displacement of 2,200 tons, and carried a crew of 450-500 men. With 42,710 square feet of sail, she reached speeds of better than 13 knots. Although Constitution has undergone several rebuildings (it is estimated that 10-15% of her original material remains in place) her basic lines have not been altered nor has her symbolic value been reduced. Now officially home-ported in Boston and berthed at the Boston Naval Shipyard, Constitution is exhibited to the public by her 50-man crew from 9:30 to 3:50 daily throughout the year.

Historical Background

The first provisions for the establishment of a Navy under the United States Constitution were made in an act passed by Congress with the intention of punishing the Barbary (Algerian) pirates for past interference with American merchantsmen and preventing further attacks by them. Signed by President Washington on March 27, 1794, the act authorized the construction or purchase of six frigates. Secretary of War Henry Knox, after conferring with prominent marine architects and shipbuilders, selected Joshua Humphreys of Philadelphia to design the new warships.

Humphreys realized that the number of ships the United States could support would be far less than the number maintained by European countries. Thus, borrowing the best features of existing English and French naval architecture, he designed a ship powerful enough to defeat any enemy of equal size yet fast enough to outsail any stronger opponent.

The U.S.S. Constitution was the second of three ships constructed from Humphrey's designs. Laid down at Hartt's Shipyard, Boston, in 1794, she was launched, on the third attempt, on October 21, 1797. The live oak, red cedar, white oak, pitch pine, and locust from which she was built came from states ranging from Maine to South Carolina and Georgia. Constitution's original gun carriages were built by Edmund Thayer. Some of her anchors were manufactured by a Mr. Barstow at Hanover, Massachusetts, while the sails of flax and rigging of tarred hemp were produced in Boston. Paul Revere supplied the composition castings, composition spikes, and copper bolts. Skillings Brothers provided carved ornaments for bow and stern. The total cost of construction was $302,718.

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On July 22, 1798, under the command of Capt. Samuel Nicholson, the Constitution first cleared for sea from Boston Roads and entered upon the destruction of French privateers in West Indian waters. In 1799 Captain Nicholson returned to Boston and gave up his command to Commodore Silas Talbot, who, with Isaac Hull as first lieutenant, took the Constitution for his flagship on the San Domingo station. In this duty she acquired no particular credit as a fighter, as she captured only a few insignificant prizes, but two events served to gain her distinction. The first was a day-long sailing race with a friendly British frigate in which the Britisher was left hull down at the end of the day, largely due to Hull's sailing skill. The second was the illegal capture of a Spanish prize, an act quickly to be repudiated by the United States Government.

From March, 1801, until August, 1803, the Constitution lay dismantled at the Boston Navy Yard. At the latter time she sailed under Edward Preble as flagship of the blockade which broke the power of the corsairs. During this war on the pirates which lasted until June, 1805, the actions of this gallant squadron with 1,060 men brought the Tripolitan forces with 25,000 men, a shore battery of 119 guns, and a naval force of 24 vessels to terms. Before returning home the Constitution was commanded first by Stephen Decatur and later by John Rodgers, under whom she captured a Tripolitan privateer having two Neapolitan prizes. After the treaty of peace she cruised in Mediterranean waters under Capt. Hugh G. Campbell for another year, and it was during this period that an attempted mutiny took place by members of her crew, who were being held long over their periods of enlistment. Between 1807 and 1809 the Constitution was laid up in New York for repairs. From 1809 to 1810 she was flagship of the Home Squadron under Commodore John Rodgers; and from 1811 to 1812 she was on special service to Europe under Capt. Isaac Hull.

On June 18, 1812, war was declared against England while the Constitution was at the navy yard, Washington, undergoing repairs. She was underway three days later under Captain Hull, with Charles Morris as first lieutenant; and on July 18 and 19, 1812, while trying to effect a rendezvous, she made her famous escape from five British frigates by the use of kedge anchors and small boats. On August 19, 1812, under Captain Hull, the Constitution completely dismantled and captured the British ship Guerrier in less than half an hour of actual close-range combat. It was in this engagement that Constitution gained the title "Old Ironsides." According to tradition, Guerriere's shots rebounded from Constitution's heavy outer planking and fell into the sea, whereupon one of the American sailors shouted "Huzza! Her sides are made of iron!"

During the fall of 1812 Constitution captured several small British ships and on December 29, under Captain William Bainbridge, she destroyed the British ship Java in a battle lasting about two hours. She returned to Boston in February, 1813 for an extensive overhaul and was forced to remain there for most of 1814 because of a heavy British blockade. Taking advantage of bad weather and poor visibility, Constitution escaped on December 18, 1814 and began her final war cruise under Captain Charles Stewart. Her last great engagement took place on February 20, 1815 when she captured the frigate Cyane and the sloop Levant in a four-hour battle off the island of Madeira.

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Constitution was laid up in the Boston Navy Yard in 1815 and remained inactive for the next six years. She then served as flagship of the Mediterranean Squadron from 1821 to 1828. In 1829 a board of naval commissioners reported her unseaworthy and recommended that she be broken up and sold. However, Oliver Wendel Holmes' famous poem "Old Ironsides" raised such a storm of protest throughout the country that the order to sell Constitution was rescinded and in 1833-35 a fairly complete reconstruction was accomplished at the navy yard in Boston; Constitution was the first ship to enter the John Quincy Adams Drydock, the famous granite facility designed by Loammi Baldwin.

Between 1835 and 1843, Constitution served successively as flagship of the Mediterranean Squadron, the Pacific Squadron, and the Home Squadron. In 1844-46 she was assigned to special service in the Indian and Pacific Oceans; on this cruise she spent 495 days at sea covering a total distance of 52,279 miles. Idle in 1847-48, Constitution then served in Mediterranean and African waters until 1855; the latter date marked the end of her really active duty.

Between 1855 and 1860 Constitution was out of commission at Portsmouth, New Hampshire. From 1860 to 1871 she was used as a school ship for the U.S. Naval Academy, first at Annapolis, Maryland and later at Newport, Rhode Island. In 1871 she was rebuilt at Philadelphia and in 1878 sailed on her last trip abroad, carrying American representatives and goods to the Universal Exposition at Paris. Used as a training ship for apprentice seamen on the Atlantic coast in 1879-81, she was laid up at New York in 1882. The following year she was moved to Portsmouth where she served as a receiving ship through 1896.

Constitution was towed to Boston in 1897 for the celebration of her centennial. Though rebuilt in 1906-07, she remained laid up at the Boston Navy Yard until 1927, when another extensive restoration was carried out. Following completion of the work (at a cost more than three times that of her original construction), in July, 1931 Constitution began a 22,000-mile tour of 33 American ports; she returned to Boston (her home port by act of Congress) in May, 1934. Since 1942 Constitution has been continuously in full commission--the longest unbroken such period in her history--and now serves as the flagship of the Commandant, First Naval District. Constitution is currently undergoing another extensive restoration begun in April, 1973 and scheduled for completion about June, 1976.

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Chapelle, H. I. The History of the American Sailing Navy (New York, 1949).
Department of the Navy, Bureau of Construction and Repair. "The United States Frigate Constitution: A Brief Account of Her History..." (Washington, 1932; reprinted 1960).
_____, Naval History Division, Ships' Histories Section. "The Story of U.S.S. Constitution" (n.p., n.d.).
Turner, Lynn W. "The Last War Cruise of Old Ironsides," American Heritage (April, 1955).

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY less than one acre

UTM REFERENCES

	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
A	19	330630	4619260
B			
C			
D			

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The National Historic Landmark designation for the U.S.S. Constitution is limited to the ship itself; there are no boundaries as such.

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE Polly M. Rettig, Historian, Landmark Review Project; original form prepared by Charles E. Shedd, Jr., Historian, 11/5/59

ORGANIZATION: Historic Sites Survey, N.P.S. — DATE: 7/25/75

STREET & NUMBER: 1100 L Street N.W. — TELEPHONE: 202-523-5464

CITY OR TOWN: Washington — STATE: D.C.

12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL ___ STATE ___ LOCAL ___

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

FEDERAL REPRESENTATIVE SIGNATURE N/A National Historic Landmark

TITLE — DATE

(NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARKS)

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION — DATE 12/2/77

ATTEST: KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER — DATE

(NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARKS)

(NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARKS)