Monday Maritime Matters

Description

Another name for from the beginnings of our Navy is Josiah Fox. Born in 1763 in Cornwall, England, he had been an apprentice at the Royal Dockyard in Portsmouth, making him unique among our early shipwrights.

Josiah appears in the story of the post-Revolutionary War naval build up when he was asked by Joshua Humphreys in 1794 to assess the design proposed by Humphreys to the War department, as there was some conflict as to whether the planned frigates would be strong enough.

From â€œSix Frigatesâ€•:

default watermark

> Foxâ€™s reaction was blunt. His view was that in the Humphreysâ€™ frigate the wales were placed too low; the bow and stern were too sharp; and there were too many hollow spaces in the hull, which would contribute the the weakness of the hullâ€™s structure. The design ought to include more rake (the stem and the stern should rise at a smaller angle from the keel). Fundamentally, Fox was concerned that the Humphreysâ€™ frigate was too long in proportion to her beam. The resulting structural weakness was so great that the ship might even break her back on launching.

The debate continued, but the historical record to allow us into the course of the conversations, as the people involved directly all lived in Philadelphia (Secretary Knox, Joshua Humphreys, Josiah Fox), and Ian toll speculates much of the discussions happened in face to face meetings, with no paper trail. The only thing we have to go on is the performance of the ships put to sea. Iâ€™d say Humphreys was right.

During this time frame, Joshua Humphreys was appointed as the â€œMaster Ship Constructorâ€• for the Navy by Secretary of War Knox, and, based on his favorable impression of Foxâ€™s knowledge of ship design, Fox was hired as a draftsman to serve under Humphreys. What happened next is what the modern Navy calls a â€œpersonality conflict.â€• Apparently Foxâ€™s drafts were not in accordance with Humphreys designs. Net result: Fox was assigned to make moulds for cutting timber. â€œThe two Quaker shipwrights eventually came to hate each otherâ€• says Toll.

There is more to that part of the working relationship to read, some of it sounding not unlike some of the meetings I was a party to attending over my career and a few years afterwards.

Fast forward to where Josiah Fox still managed to â€œget around the system:â€•



Fox was the supervising shipwright for the USS CHESAPEAKE. CHESAPEAKE was an oddity in the line of our first naval combatants in that she was not named for something related to The Constitution, but named for a bay. In addition, there was already a USS CHESAPEAKE, a sloop of war, in commission (she was recommissioned USS PATAPSCO) at the time. The distinction continued in that â€œFrigate Dâ€• was shorter in length and broader in beam than the other ships, as a result of Fox altering the design to meet his concepts of ship design, based on his Royal Naval shipbuilding background. Built in Norfolk, she was shown to be slower than her sister ships due to significant design alterations.No Navy ships have been named in honor of Josiah Fox. He was a key figure in the formulation of ship design, being a thorn in the side of the man who envisioned a completely new layout for warships, which went on to have provide our nation with a maritime force capable of standing up to the navies of Europe.

The ship picked up a reputation as unlucky early on in her career at sea.

Category

1. Military
2. Military History
3. Navy

default watermark

Date Created
June 25, 2007
Author
admin