

## John Woodman Wentworth

### Joining the Navy

My name is John Woodman Wentworth and I was born in Orrington, Maine on January 28, 1791, the son of Grant and Lucy Woodman Wentworth.

I enlisted in the United States Navy in New York on April 2, 1811, when I was 20 years old. The Navy sent me to the Washington Navy Yard, and I served on board USS *Constellation* and USS *Hornet* before joining *Constitution* in July of 1811.

### On board USS *Constitution*

I joined *Constitution's* crew as an ordinary seaman. I'd been to sea before, but I didn't have the experience some of my shipmates had. Beyond basic seamanship I knew very little. My pay was \$10 per month, but I was happy to earn such wages!

I learned quickly on board ship. Less than a year later, I took my place in the foretop, where I worked to set and furl the sails on the foremast. Looking down from that height is enough to make your hands shake – and problem since you must hold on with all your might!

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### Exercising the Guns Can Be a Dangerous Thing

When the officers called us to our battle stations, I reported to gun number 12 on the gundeck- a huge iron cannon weighing nearly 7,000 pounds. On August 12, 1812, while exercising the gun, the breech tackle, the thick rope that keeps the gun from rolling wildly along the deck, got tangled. As I stepped to clear it so that the gun could roll in, one wheel of the carriage ran over my right foot. It severed the tendons and muscles between my ankle and toes, and made my toes and foot stiff and useless.

### Battles Won

Despite my foot injury and my time in sickbay, I still fought in the successful battle with HMS *Guerriere*, and fought again when we captured HMS *Java* off the coast of Brazil. Besides my pay, I received a share of the \$100,000 awarded to the crew for both victories over the British ships- more than \$80!

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### **After USS *Constitution***

I was discharged from the ship on April 2, 1813 at Boston, and returned to Maine. I married Polly Wentworth on November 4, 1816, and together we had twelve children. I continued by work at sea as a merchant sailor, but my wartime injury plagued me for the rest of my life. As the years rolled on, it was painful and difficult to walk or stand for any length of time, or keep my foot from freezing in the cold season of the year. Finally, in 1845, I was able to gather the documentation needed to prove I was injured in the line of duty.

In May 1846, I was granted a pension of \$36 per year for my disability, and in 1851 it was increased to \$54 per year. I asked that

my pension be paid from the time of my discharge from the service on April 2, 1813.

*Wentworth died on June 10, 1863 in Orrington, Maine.*