

USS *Hannah*: The Schooner That Helped Launch an American Navy



Before the United States had a formal navy, a small fishing schooner helped ignite America's fight at sea. The USS *Hannah*—a modest 4-gun vessel—holds a special place in American history as the first armed ship to serve the revolutionary cause during the American Revolutionary War.

Originally built as a fishing schooner, *Hannah* belonged to merchant and militia leader John Glover of Marblehead. Glover named the vessel after his daughter, Hannah Glover. When tensions with Britain erupted in 1775, the ship—and many of the sailors who worked aboard her—were pressed into service for the patriot cause. Most of the crew came from Marblehead, a coastal town known for its skilled seamen.

In September 1775, George Washington hired the schooner into the service of the Continental Army. On September 2, he commissioned Nicholson Broughton to command the vessel and ordered him to patrol the waters near Boston. His mission was clear: intercept ships carrying supplies, weapons, or troops for British forces.

Hannah sailed from Beverly harbor on September 5, 1775. Only two days later she was chased by the British warship HMS *Lively* and another vessel, forcing the schooner to take refuge in Gloucester. After escaping the harbor, the ship captured a sloop named *Unity*, marking an early success for the fledgling American maritime effort.

Hannah was part of what became known as "Washington's Fleet," a small group of hastily armed vessels that included the schooners *Warren*, *Lee*, *Franklin*, and *Hancock*. Staffed largely by Marblehead sailors, these ships preyed on British supply vessels along the Massachusetts coast. Their captures brought much-needed ammunition and equipment to the Continental forces.

Despite its early promise, *Hannah's* naval career was brief. On October 10, 1775, the British sloop HMS *Nautilus* drove the schooner aground near Beverly. Local militia from Beverly and Salem exchanged fire with the British ship for several hours, allowing *Hannah* to escape destruction. Though damaged only slightly, the schooner was soon decommissioned as Washington acquired more capable ships.

What happened to *Hannah* afterward remains uncertain. One legend claims the vessel was renamed *Lynch* and later sailed to France with correspondence for Benjamin Franklin. According to this story, the ship was captured by the British warship HMS *Foudroyant* and sold as a merchant vessel. However, many historians believe the original schooner may have been destroyed or dismantled soon after its military service ended.

Although small and short-lived, *Hannah* played an outsized role in American naval heritage. Both Beverly and Marblehead proudly claim connections to the vessel, each celebrating its role in the birth of the nation's sea power. Today, the legacy of the humble schooner lives on in local memorials, school names, and museum displays—reminders that America's navy began not with great warships, but with determined sailors and a converted fishing boat.