



USS Constitution Museum
We've got it!

*The Andrew Jackson Mouth:
Part of the Figurehead on CONSTITUTION in 1834*

BOSTON, MA- The USS Constitution Museum has got it! The mouth section of USS *Constitution's* Andrew Jackson figurehead that was decapitated in 1834 now resides at the Museum in Boston. The rest of the head that was split in two when it was removed in the dark of night from 'Old Ironsides,' is at the Museum of the City of New York. But the location of the mouth was a mystery until now.

Andrew Jackson never won a popularity contest in Boston. Because of his anti-mercantile policies, the seventh president had more than his fair share of detractors among the Boston elite. In the spring of 1834, when *Constitution's* Capt. Jesse Duncan Elliot had the gall to order a new figurehead for the ship featuring Jackson's gaunt frame and visage, Bostonians were outraged. Calling it a "foul disgrace" bordering on vandalism of their favorite ship, they vowed revenge.

In the middle of a dark and stormy night in July, a young Boston sea captain named Samuel Dewey procured a small rowboat and pulled beneath *Constitution's* looming bow. All the sentries had retreated to the shelter of their boxes, and Dewey gingerly scaled the ship's slippery side, till he clung to the side, face to face with "Old Hickory" himself. Drawing a saw, he began to hack away at the figure's head. After a few strokes, he hit an iron bolt. Undeterred, he began a new cut just below the nose. A few minutes of frantic sawing and the head came free.

In the days following, as word of the decapitation spread, Dewey and his trophy were celebrated at a number of local parties. The mutilation also caused excitement in the rest of the country: Jackson's followers were outraged, his critics amused. Eventually, the clamor died down and the figurehead was repaired and then replaced. Descending down the family tree of the Secretary of the Navy, the head, removed by Dewey ended up at the Museum of the City of New York. But the question remained, what happened to the lower part of the head? Last year, a woman from New York approached the "History Detectives," a PBS-produced television program, with a mystery. She had in her possession a piece of painted wood featuring well-modeled lips and a chin. Could this be the missing piece of the Jackson figurehead? After setting the stage with a visit to the USS Constitution and the Museum, the detectives compared the piece to the rest of the head at the Museum of the City of New York. They matched! Thanks to the generous donors to the USS Constitution Museum's Commodore's Fund, the Museum was able to acquire the missing mouth and it will soon be on display in our galleries.

USS Constitution Museum

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