

# WHITE HOUSE HISTORY

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White House Historical Association  
Washington

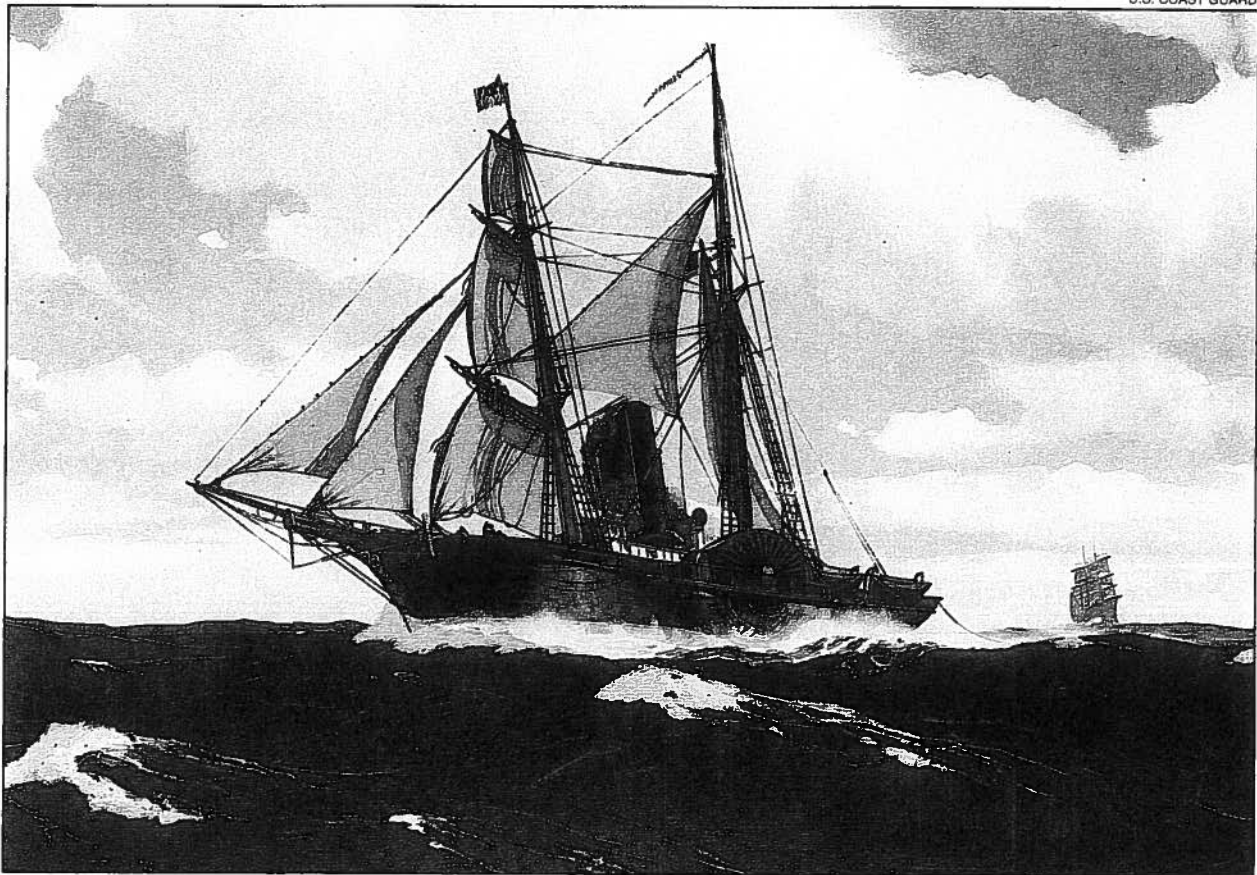
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# The USRMCS Harriet Lane

Robert L. Anderson



**T**he U.S. Revenue Marine Cutter Service steamer *Harriet Lane*, commissioned in 1858 and the service's only cutter ever named for a woman, shared more than her name with President James Buchanan's niece and official hostess. First Lady Harriet Lane was described in a contemporary biography as a woman whose "every motion was instinct with life, health, and intelligence. Her head and features were cast in noble mould, and her form, which at rest had something of the massive majesty of a marble pillar, in motion was instinct alike with power and grace."<sup>1</sup>

The USRMCS *Harriet Lane* was similarly noted for its strength and beauty. One hundred eighty feet long with elegant brigantine rigging (to provide auxiliary power should the steam engines fail) and a raked funnel, the *Lane* was widely held to be one of the most handsome steamers built in the United States up to that time. Even the often awkward side-wheels did nothing to detract from the ship's beauty. Its first captain, John Faunce, wrote, "I am happy to say that the 'Harriet Lane' is a noble vessel, and I think one of the best specimens of naval architecture built in this country."<sup>2</sup>

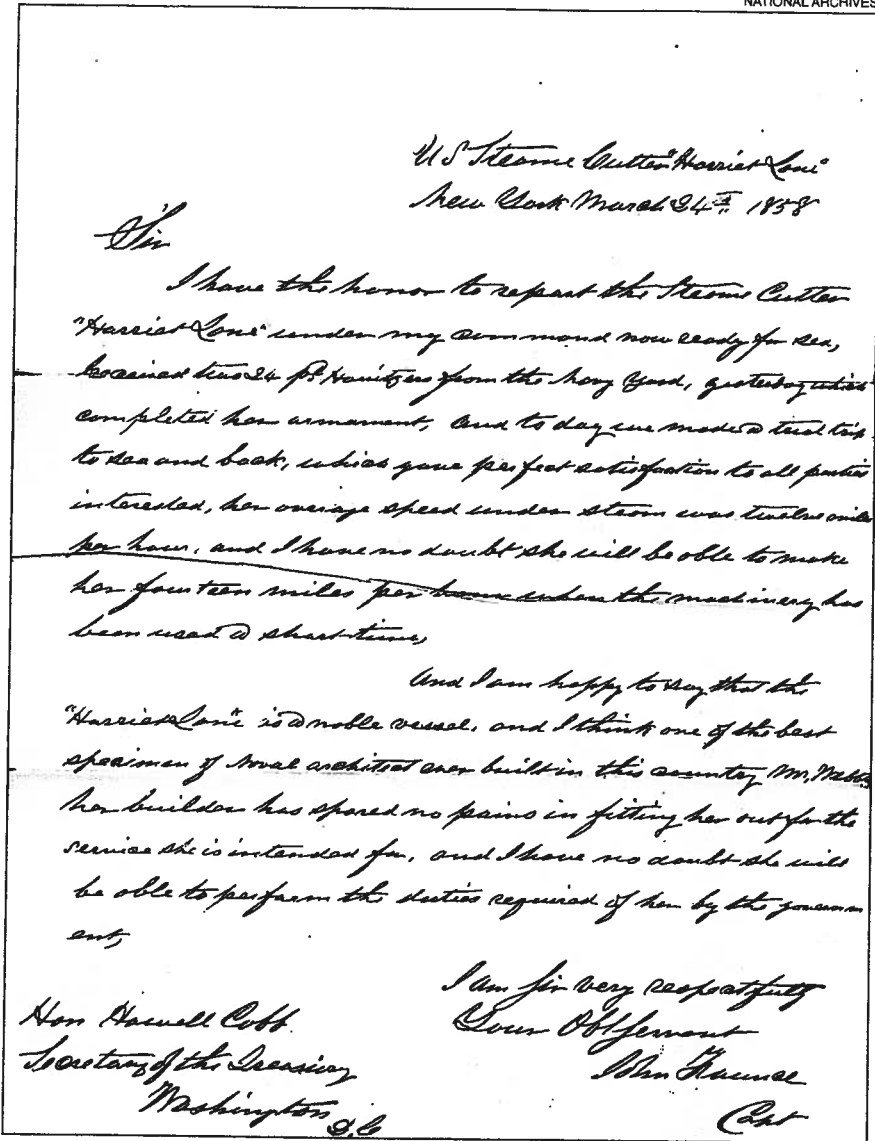
The two well-loved Lanes were to travel together only a few times, most memorably on a royal visit to Mount Vernon. That story began on the morning of October 5, 1860: the yards were manned, the deck had been holystoned, and the side-wheel steamship *Harriet Lane* greeted three distinguished visitors with a 21-gun salute at the Washington Navy Yard pier. The illustrious party included President James Buchanan, First Lady Harriet Lane, the Baron Renfrew (incognito of Albert Edward, Prince of Wales, later King Edward VII), and their entourages. The first lady and the prince were friends of long-standing, having first met during the Franklin Pierce administration, when Buchanan was minister to Great Britain. The voyage was under way by 11:00 a.m. and favored by a clear day with only a light wind from the south. The ship's log noted that the steamer covered the distance downriver in just under one and one-half hours<sup>3</sup>—enough time for the party to partake of a sumptuous luncheon on deck.

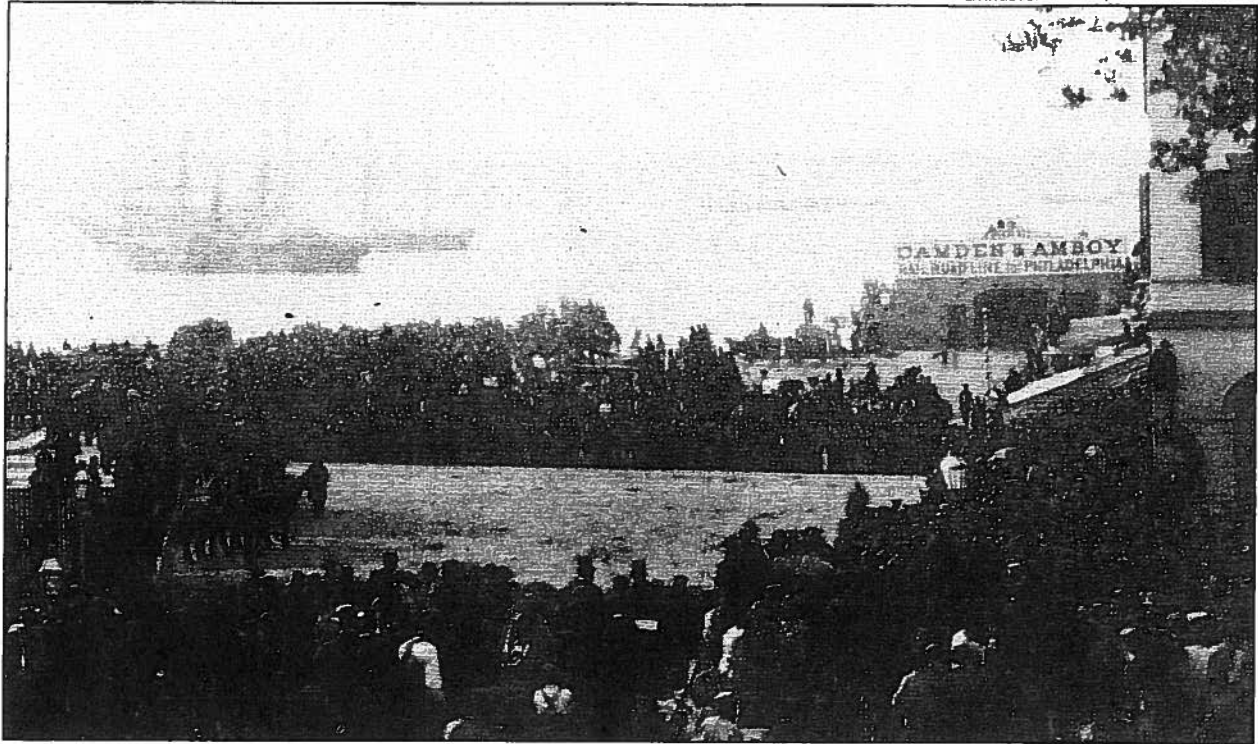
Disembarking at Mount Vernon, the prince, in the company of the president and Miss Lane, toured the house and grounds and, in a moving ceremony, planted a memorial chestnut tree near George Washington's tomb. Back aboard the ship, the party enjoyed music and dancing (something not permitted in the austere Buchanan White House itself), with the prince leading out Miss Lane for the first dance.

The next day saw the prince once again aboard

the *Lane* for another cruise down the Potomac, this time to Aquia Creek, Virginia, where he and his suite "who were to proceed from there to Richmond by the cars," disembarked.<sup>4</sup> At least one source suggests that Miss Lane accompanied the prince on his trip to Aquia and that they observed a slave auction while there,<sup>5</sup> but on this the ship's own voice is silent.

The *Harriet Lane* returned to its home port of New York City on October 9 but had not seen the last of Albert Edward just yet. The prince was coming to visit the city, and its citizens were planning a fitting reception in his honor. Starting early on October 11, the ship and its crew were on call for the prince. Albert Edward arrived in South





Left: Captain John Faunce wrote proudly of the *Harriet Lane* in his letter of March 1858, calling it “one of the best specimens of naval architecture built in this country.” Above: The *Harriet Lane* (the closest vessel in the picture) carried the Prince of Wales to New York in 1860. A crowd gathered to witness him disembark. At right is the Camden and Amboy Railroad Line terminal for Philadelphia.

Amboy, New Jersey, where the *Lane* picked him up and took him to New York. The morning of October 12, the ship embarked the prince while anchored off Ward’s Island and delivered him to the Ninth Street pier. *Harriet Lane*’s last meeting with the royal personage occurred three days later on October 15, when the ship ferried the prince up the Hudson River to West Point, where he left behind many good wishes, \$300, and a problematic watch.<sup>6</sup>

The ship that was accorded the singular honor of hosting the United States’s first visiting royalty was not just any ordinary naval vessel; it did not

in fact belong to the United States Navy at all, at least not yet. The *Harriet Lane* was the pride of the United States Department of the Treasury’s Revenue Marine Cutter Service. This service and its ships, referred to as cutters, were the forerunners of the modern United States Coast Guard. Their job was to enforce maritime law, assist ships in trouble, and guard the nation’s coastline.

Why did a revenue cutter get the call to play host for royalty? Why not one of the U.S. Navy’s sleek and imposing screw-driven sloops of war? The answer to that question likely perished with the men who made it, forcing us to speculate

1. Virginia Tatnall Peacock, *Famous American Belles of the Nineteenth Century* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1901), 163.
2. John Faunce to Howell Cobb, Secretary of the Treasury, New York, March 24, 1858, copy print, Register of Letters Received from Officers of Revenue Cutters, 1854–60, Record Group 26, NC 31, entry 151, box 21, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C. John Faunce, one of the most respected officers of the Revenue Marine, was appointed the ship’s captain on November 30, 1857.
3. Records of the Revenue Cutter Service, Logs of Revenue Cutters and Coast Guard Vessels, 1819–1941, RG 26, NC 31, entry 159A, box 1163, National Archives.
4. Ibid.
5. Florence Kern, *The United States Revenue Cutters in the Civil War* (Bethesda, Md.: Alised Enterprises, 1980), 2–5.
6. Records of the Revenue Cutter Service, Logs of Revenue Cutters and Coast Guard Vessels, 1819–1941, RG 26, NC 31, entry 159A, box 1163, National Archives.

**PROPOSALS FOR A STEAM REVENUE CUTTER.**

TREASURY DEPARTMENT,  
February 12, 1857.

The Department desires proposals and specifications for the construction of a Steam Cutter under the Act of Congress approved the 5th day of February, 1857.

The proposals must be for a vessel of six hundred tons burthen, Custom House measurement, with double engines and side wheels.

The vessel must be built of the best and most durable materials and with the fittings usual in the United States Navy, and of sufficient strength not only for navigation, but also as a war vessel in emergencies, and with a draft of water not exceeding 22 feet. Ovens to be plainly finished with black walnut, with separate rooms for Captain and three Lieutenants.

The vessel must be of the fastest sailing qualities as a steam vessel, and must also be rigged as a sail vessel.

The vessel must be armed for four guns on each side, and two pivot guns on bow and stern.

The proposal must be accompanied by a model.

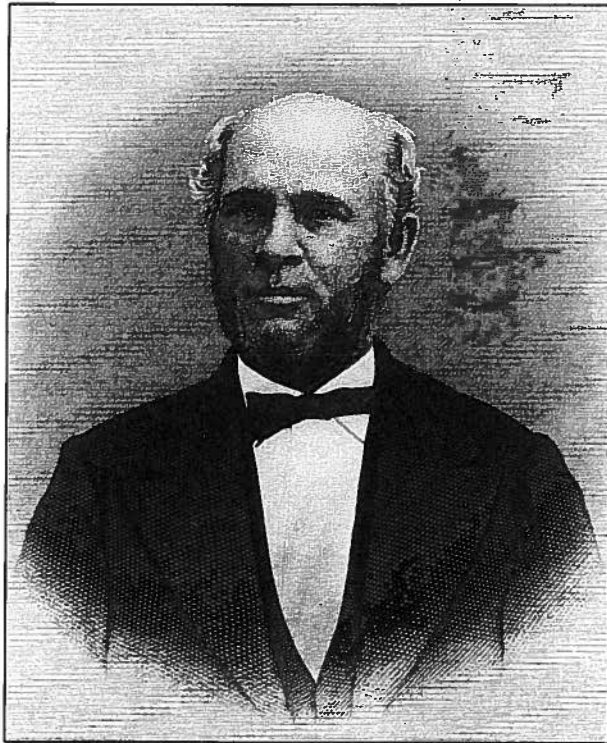
The Department, in calling for models, specifications and proposals, will select that model, specification and proposal, calculated to secure the strongest, fastest and best vessel, but the model, specification and price will be the subject of agreement, before the contract is reduced to writing.

These proposals will be sent to the Department only by ship builders, and will be for the vessel, engines, sails, &c., all complete for sea, except the guns and sent sealed to the Department as of before the thirteenth day of April next, when they will be opened for consideration.

The models and specifications will be considered part of the proposals for the work, and returned to the parties not obtaining the contract.

JAMES GUTHRIE,  
Secretary of the Treasury.

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about fears of leaving the young prince with impressions of a militaristic foreign power or, more worryingly, a nation whose warships did not quite measure up to those of the Monarch of the Seas. More likely, however, it had something to do with byzantine intradepartmental power struggles and a desire to impress the president and his

*Memorandum of Estimates furnished the Treasury Dept in compliance with advertisement dated Treasury Dept February 12<sup>th</sup> 1857, and headed "Proposals for a Steam Revenue Cutter of 600 tons burthen Custom House Measurement"*

<i>Laugh &amp; Lim</i>	\$ 110,000
<i>Harshor</i>	140,000
<i>Page &amp; Allen</i>	150,000
<i>Sters</i>	138,000
<i>Bell</i>	129,000
<i>Harrington</i>	140,000
<i>Webb</i>	150,000
<i>Gollmer</i>	131,725
<i>Stack</i>	136,750
<i>Harley</i>	124,900
<i>Hortrocht</i>	122,500
<i>Carshin</i>	120,000
<i>Giffitt</i>	150,000
<i>Hatterton</i>	84,940

*Webb's Approval \$ 150,000*  
*Page & Allen " 150,000*  
*Hortrocht " 122,500*  
3) \$22,500

*Average \$140,833 or \$235 per ton*  
*Draft of 640 tons as recommended by Board of*  
*Examiners at \$235 per ton equal \$150,400*

A newspaper advertisement dated February 12, 1856, sought bidders to construct the new ship. An 1856 memorandum lists the shipbuilders submitting proposals in response to the newspaper advertisement for the new steam revenue cutter. The three finalists were each marked with an "x." The contract was awarded to William Webb (pictured at left).

first lady by sending her namesake. The resolution (H.R. 251) authorizing the ship that became the *Harriet Lane* was introduced in 1856 by Representative Guy Ray Pelton of New York. Representative Pelton, responding to a memorial (petition) by a group of "underwriters, merchants, and ship-owners of the port of New

York praying that an efficient steamer may be substituted for the sailing revenue cutter now employed in that vicinity," introduced a bill to "authorize the President of the United States to cause to be procured, by purchase or otherwise, a suitable steamer, to be stationed at the port of New York as a revenue cutter, and for the purpose of affording relief to distressed vessels, their passengers and crews."<sup>7</sup>

After minor debate in both houses of Congress, the bill became law—minus the language restricting the ship to the port of New York and giving it the "purpose of affording relief to distressed vessels, their passengers and crews." The "steam revenue cutter," as the *Lane* was known in correspondence prior to its christening, would be the service's first nonsailing cutter since eight ill-starred iron steamships were constructed and quickly discarded in the 1840s. The *Lane* would also be one of its finest.

The Treasury duly placed advertisements, dated February 12, 1856, in major newspapers seeking bidders to construct the new ship, such a competition being unusual for the time. To evaluate the 18 designs submitted by the 14 builders, the department appointed a distinguished three-man board, the Board of Examination of Revenue Marine Steam Vessels. It consisted of Samuel Pook, naval constructor; Henry Hunt, chief engineer of the U.S. Navy; and Charles W. Copeland, naval engineer. The board held its first meeting on April 16 in Washington, D.C. Hunt was absent until April 23 due to a case of the bilious fever, and the navy secretary saw fit to add Francis Grice, naval constructor, to the board on April 20.

The board reviewed designs from all 14 shipbuilders, some of whom had submitted multiple options. During the period of the review, the various builders bombarded the department and the board with missives touting the merits of their designs and listing the names of their politically connected friends and associates who could vouch

for their integrity and qualifications. Their submissions are instructive as to the state of government ship contracting in the mid-19th century.

Some of the designs were a little more complete than others. Not every builder felt compelled to include detailed plans and specifications of the ship he proposed to build; several provided only a hull model, and some submissions lacked critical data that would allow the board to determine the ship's suitability for its intended role or to compare it against the other designs submitted. A complaint common to several designs was that they were "too fine at the ends" for carrying the pivot guns specified in the advertisement.

In the end, the board narrowed the choices to three: Page and Allen of Portsmouth, Virginia; Jacob A. Westervelt of New York (builder of the Navy's screw sloop *Brooklyn*); and William Webb of New York (best known for his fast, sleek clipper ships). On April 27, a final vote on each design was taken, with the Webb design receiving four votes in its favor, while the other two each tallied three votes for and one dissenting. Of particular merit in the Webb design, said the board in its minutes, were its "inclined engines with return flue boilers."<sup>8</sup> Board secretary William Handy submitted the final report to the Treasury on April 28, and the contract with Webb, for \$140,000, was signed on June 26, 1857. The cost of armaments and other government-furnished equipment was expected to raise the total cost to \$150,000.

The design changes began almost immediately. Engineer Hunt suggested replacing the specified inclined engines with vertical ones and substituting one-piece, hammered, wrought-iron frames for wood frames connected by diagonal iron straps as proposed by Webb.<sup>9</sup> (In the end Webb got his inclined engines when engineer Copeland, supervising the construction of the ship's engines, endorsed his request to return to the original design and the iron frames were never approved.)

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7. 34th Cong., 3rd sess., *Congressional Globe*, December 22, 1856, 173–76.

8. Proceedings of the Board of Examination of Revenue Marine Steam Vessels, April 28, 1857, Records of the Revenue Marine Cutter Service, Reports and Correspondence Relating to the Construction of Vessels, 1830–70, RG 26, NC 31, entry 199A, box 3, National Archives.

9. Henry Hunt to Howell Cobb, Secretary of the Treasury, Washington D.C., May 23, 1857, Records of the Revenue Marine Cutter Service, Reports and Correspondence Relating to the Construction of Vessels, 1830–70, RG 26, NC 31, entry 199A, box 3, National Archives.



Constructor Pook (soon to be construction superintendent), in a June 23 letter to Commander E.A.F. Lavallette, commandant of the Washington Navy Yard, suggested that these and other proposed changes would add \$5,000 to the overall cost.<sup>10</sup> In the end, this does not seem to have happened: Webb received only his specified \$140,000.

So what would the government be getting for its \$150,000? The as yet nameless ship would eventually weigh in at some 674 tons, have a length of 180 feet, a beam (width) of 30 feet, a freeboard (height above the water) of 12.5 feet, and a draft (depth below the water) of 10 feet. The 25 pounds per square inch of steam pressure generated by the boilers would turn twin side-wheels at 25 revolutions per minute, giving the ship a design speed of 14 nautical miles (16.1 miles) per hour. A brigantine rigging provided auxiliary (sail) power.

The ship's armament, specified in the advertisement as "four guns on each side, and two pivot guns on bow and stern," became a subject of some debate. It would eventually consist of one 32-pound (weight of shot) pivot gun, four 24-pound howitzers, and one 12-pound howitzer to serve as a gun for the ship's boat. Commander John Adolphus Bernard Dahlgren, head of naval ordnance, had recommended 13 tons of cannon for the ship: 9-inch shell guns (designed by Dahlgren) fore and aft, and either eight 12-pound howitzers or four 24-pound howitzers. The board of review, not seeing the cutter as strictly a warship, ignored his recommendation and selected a more modest, although still impressive, battery.

Launched on November 19, 1857, the ship was commissioned on February 28, 1858, at Webb's East River Yard in New York City. The *Harriet Lane* first got up steam on March 11 and proceeded to the New York Navy Yard to take on its first foreign dignity, "the Admiral Mohammad Pasha," commander of the Turkish Navy, for a trip down to Coney Island. The ship finished fitting out and

had its armament on board by March 23. By March 24, construction superintendent Pook and the ship's captain, John Faunce, certified the completion and readiness for service of the ship, now named the *Harriet Lane* after recently inaugurated President James Buchanan's niece and official hostess. Treasury Secretary Howell Cobb had made the suggestion to name the new steam cutter after the popular first lady. On April 2, the ship was assigned to the collector of customs at New York City. Reporting for duty on the April 5, the *Lane* was soon plying New York Harbor and the surrounding sea pursuing slave ships (including the notorious slaver *Wanderer*), aiding vessels in distress, and keeping the peace at sea.

The United States Navy, always short on good ships, had taken notice of the *Lane* even before it was built; this was shown by the secretary of the Navy's assignment of Francis Grice to the Board of Examination. On July 28, 1858, Navy Secretary Isaac Toucey asked the secretary of the treasury to loan him the *Harriet Lane* "for the purpose of forming a part of the Naval force to be sent to Paraguay."<sup>11</sup> There, in February 1855, the U.S. ship *Waterwitch* had been fired upon without provocation by Paraguayan forces. After several years of requesting reparations and apologies through the usual diplomatic channels, the United States hardened its position and sent Special Commissioner James B. Bowlin to treat with Paraguay's dictator, Carlos Antonio Lopez. To support Commissioner Bowlin's negotiating position the government also dispatched a squadron of ships mounting a total of 24 11-inch guns, 23 9-inch guns, 11 24-pound howitzers, and 18 12-pound howitzers.<sup>12</sup>

Bowlin's instructions were to "adjust the difficulties by treaty stipulations" or, having failed to do so, "to retire from Asuncion and give . . . [Flag Officer William B. Schubrick, squadron commander] notice of his having failed in the object of his mission."<sup>13</sup> Upon receiving this notification, Schubrick was to blockade the Paraguay and

10. Samuel Pook to Commander E.A.F. Lavallette, Washington, D.C., June 23, 1857, Records of the Revenue Marine Cutter Service, Reports and Correspondence Relating to the Construction of Vessels, 1830-70, RG 26, NC 31, entry 199A, box 3, National Archives.

11. Isaac Toucey to Howell Cobb, Secretary of the Treasury, Washington, D.C., July 28, 1858, *Record of Movements: Vessels of the United States Coast Guard 1790-December 31, 193*, 35.

12. *Record of Movements: Vessels of the United States Coast Guard, 1790-December 31, 1933*, 36.

13. *Ibid.*, 35.

Paraná Rivers and the towns and cities on their banks. The *Lane* received notification of its new mission on July 30 and was ready to sail on October 7, but its departure was delayed by the purser of the navy ship *Supply*, who was behind in his accounts, which included supplying the *Lane*. The *Harriet Lane* arrived in Barbados on October 20, where it coaled before departing on October 25 for Pernambuco, Brazil, a place of later significance in the ship's history.

On November 17, the ship put into San Luz, Brazil, short of Pernambuco, due to heavy weather and poor Barbadian coal. The *Lane* again coaled and finally reached Pernambuco on November 25, leaving the next day for St. Catherines. After two days' sailing, the crankpin on the starboard engine broke and the ship had to proceed to Rio de Janeiro for repairs.

By February 23, 1859, all ships of the Paraguay expedition had arrived in the Paraná River, and Dictator Lopez, facing the threat of considerable naval might, promptly gave in and agreed to the request for an apology and an indemnity for the family of the sailor killed on the *Waterwitch*. He also signed a commercial treaty most favorable to the United States.<sup>14</sup> The *Harriet Lane* was praised by Flag Officer Schubrick in a letter to the secretary of the navy for its valuable assistance, especially in freeing other vessels of the squadron that had run aground in the treacherous Paraná River.<sup>15</sup> Upon returning to New York after a voyage of 28 days, the *Harriet Lane* was returned to the Revenue Marine on April 27, 1859.

The ship got a first look at the woman for whom it was named on June 6, 1859. On that date Miss Harriet Lane took a day-long excursion up the North River and back with her friends, burning 22,000 pounds of the government's coal.<sup>16</sup>

Once the press got wind of the day trip, Miss Lane (and, by extension, her uncle the president) was roundly criticized for using public property for such a frivolous purpose.<sup>17</sup>

On October 27, 1859, the *Harriet Lane* received new orders: to "cruise from the Northern boundary to Southern Point of Florida, to prevent violations of the law relating to the slave trade."<sup>18</sup> The *Harriet Lane*'s career from October 1859, save for its encounter with the Prince of Wales, consisted principally of tasks standard to all revenue cutters. The ship's special aptitude, however, lay in pursuing smugglers and suspected slave ships, both in northern waters and off the southern coast, a role for which its speed, shallow draft, and seaworthiness fitted it admirably.

The winter of 1859–60 saw the ship off the Florida and Carolina coasts, spending much time around Savannah and Charleston cooperating with the collectors of customs in those two great ports. Returning to New York City in the late spring of 1860, the ship resumed routine patrols in and around the bustling harbor. Other familiar duties were also resumed as the ship once again played host to dignitaries, both foreign and domestic.

On June 28, 1860, the assistant secretary of the treasury and the New York collector of customs boarded the ship to a nine-gun salute at 2:30 p.m. and set off to intercept the Royal Mail Steamer *Great Eastern*, arriving in the harbor after setting a new transatlantic crossing record. On the next day, the *Lane* got under way at 2:15 p.m. and picked up the first Japanese embassy to the United States at Pier 1 on the North River. The ship cast off again at 3:00 p.m. and went back upriver to deliver the Japanese representatives to the frigate USS *Niagara*, whose captain the *Lane* saluted with 13 guns, at 5:30 p.m.

On August 23, 1860, the *Harriet Lane* was

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14. Department of the Navy, *Dictionary of American Naval Fighting Ships* (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office), 3:250.

15. William B. Schubrick to Isaac Toucey, Secretary of the Navy, January 19, 1859, off Paraguay, *Record of Movements: Vessels of the United States Coast Guard, 1790–December 31, 1933*, 36.

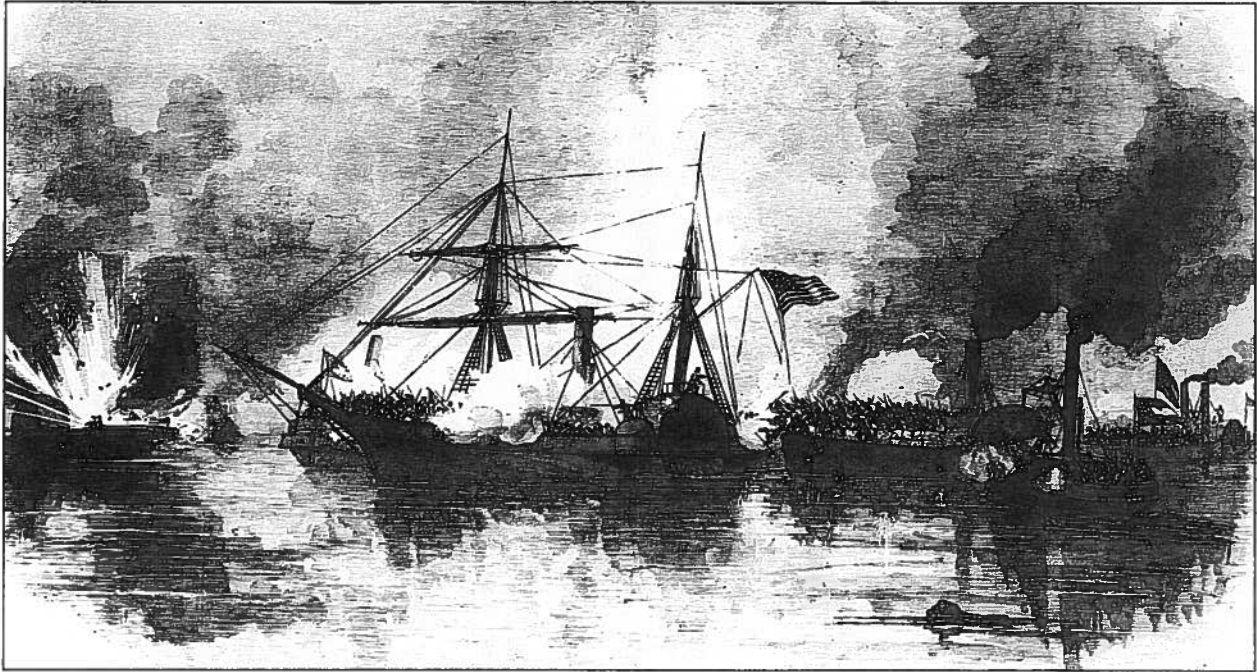
16. The party boarded the ship that morning, got under way at 10:40 a.m., and stood up the North River. At 2:40 p.m. the ship anchored and the party landed at West Point, returning at 7:15 p.m. and proceeding back downriver, arriving at the Battery at 11:30 p.m. Records of the Revenue Cutter Service, Logs of Revenue Cutters and Coast Guard Vessels, 1819–1941, RG 26, NC 31, entry 159A, box 1163, National Archives.

17. Mary Virginia Shelly and Sandra Harrison Munro, *Harriet Lane: First Lady of the White House* (Lititz, Pa.: Sutter House, 1980).

18. *Record of Movements: Vessels of the United States Coast Guard 1790–December 31, 1933*, 37.







*Line engraving entitled Surprise and Capture of the United States Steamer "Harriet Lane," by the Confederates, under General Magruder, and the Destruction of the Flagship "Westfield" in Galveston Harbor, Texas, January 1st, 1863. The Lane is shown in the center, under attack by the Confederate gunboats Neptune and Bayou City. The Westfield is at the far left, being blown up to prevent her capture.*

cruising off New York near Hell Gate when it bore up on a schooner that it endeavored to pass to the right. The schooner, however, swung across the *Lane's* path, resulting in a collision so serious that repairs were not finally completed until September 30, the day the ship departed for Washington and its appointment with royalty.

Upon parting with the *Harriet Lane* in October 1860, the Prince of Wales had left behind best wishes and two somewhat more tangible reminders of his presence: \$300 and a watch. The \$300 was equitably distributed to the crew on October 18, perhaps tempting Seaman Daniel Perry to strike out on his own while flush with his new stake, for he certainly deserted while on duty that day. The watch, given to Captain Faunce,

caused more than a little complexity for that officer. He wrote to the secretary of the treasury, Howell Cobb, on October 22 requesting relief from "the 8th division, 9th section of the 1st article," which precluded his acceptance of the "chronometer watch" without congressional approval, on the grounds that the Prince of Wales was not a reigning sovereign.<sup>19</sup> Secretary Cobb replied that the captain could indeed retain the watch.<sup>20</sup> Secretary Cobb himself came aboard the *Lane* on October 25 to a 17-gun salute for a brief cruise on his finest revenue cutter.<sup>21</sup>

Following this flurry of celebrity passengers, the *Lane* returned to the less-glamorous life of a working revenue cutter, seizing slavers and smugglers and generally keeping order in New York

19. John Faunce to Howell Cobb, Secretary of the Treasury, October 22, 1860, New York, Register of Letters Received from Officers of Revenue Cutters, 1854-60, RG 26, NC 31, entry 151, box 24, National Archives. The relevant text of Article 1, Section 9 of the Constitution of the United States: "No Title of Nobility shall be granted by the United States: And no Person holding any Office of Profit or Trust under them, shall, without the Consent of the Congress, accept of any present, Emolument, Office, or Title, of any kind whatever, from any King, Prince, or foreign State."

20. Howell Cobb to Captain John Faunce, November 30, 1857, Register of Letters Sent to Officers on Revenue Cutters, 1854-1861, RG 26, N C31, entry 143A, vol. 16.

21. Records of the Revenue Cutter Service, Logs of Revenue Cutters and Coast Guard Vessels, 1819-1941, RG 26, NC 31, entry 159A, box 1163, National Archives.

Harbor. However, the November 1860 election of Abraham Lincoln as successor to President Buchanan opened a new chapter in the service life of the *Harriet Lane* and its Revenue Marine crew.

The impending breach between the northern and southern states had the Navy Department deeply worried. The navy, always neglected during periods of peace, had too few ships and men to play the role projected for it should the southern states secede. Casting about for hulls and men to fill its ranks, the Navy once again called upon the Treasury Department for the loan of its excellent (and only) steam revenue cutter. As a result, on April 5, 1861 (three years to the day after the ship reported for duty at New York City), Captain Faunce once again received orders detaching him from the New York Customs District and placing the *Harriet Lane* under the orders of the Navy Department.

The *Lane*'s first assignment for the navy was to escort ships sailing to resupply Major Robert Anderson and his besieged garrison at Fort Sumter, in Charleston Harbor. The ship left New York on April 8 and arrived off Charleston on April 11. On April 12, the day the secessionists opened their bombardment of Fort Sumter, the *Lane* fired a shot across the bow of the steamer *Nashville*, which was showing no colors. *Nashville* promptly ran up the Stars and Stripes, but two days later showed its true colors when it displayed a secessionist flag and sailed on to become a renowned blockade-runner and raider. This made the *Lane*'s warning shot the first naval shot fired by either side in the Civil War.

Unable to be resupplied from the sea, Major Anderson surrendered his fort on April 13, and the relief squadron took off the garrison and delivered it to New York. The *Lane* spent the next several weeks escorting ships filled with men and war matériel down the East Coast. On one return voyage, it escorted the USS *Constitution*, then serving as the U.S. Naval Academy, as Old Ironsides was towed from Annapolis to Newport, Rhode Island.

Beginning on August 26, 1861, the *Lane* operated with an amphibious task force sent to seize Confederate Forts Clark and Hatteras, guarding the Hatteras Inlet on North Carolina's Outer Banks. The *Lane*'s shallow draft allowed it, along with the gunboats *Monticello* and *Pawnee*, to move close inshore and cover the August 28 landings of Union troops, who quickly seized the pair of forts. The day following this significant triumph (the first for the Union in the war), the ship ran aground entering Pamlico Sound and was forced to jettison most of its heavy equipment and furnishings to free itself. Badly damaged, the ship effected temporary repairs and made Hampton Roads on September 8.

On September 11, Treasury Secretary Salmon P. Chase signed the papers officially transferring the *Harriet Lane* to the Navy "as required by law," President Lincoln having already signed legislation handing the *Lane* over to the Navy: "By virtue of authority vested in me under the fifth section of an act of Congress entitled an act relative to the revenue marine to fix the compensation of the officers thereof and for other purposes, approved 25 July 1861, I hereby transfer permanently to the Navy the steamer *Harriet Lane*, heretofore belonging to the Revenue Cutter Service."<sup>22</sup> Captain Faunce dutifully delivered his ship to the Philadelphia Navy Yard on September 17 and then proceeded to New York, where he reported himself available for new duties on September 19.

After refitting in Philadelphia and receiving an enhanced battery of three 9-inch shell guns and one 30-pound rifle,<sup>23</sup> the ship sailed south on February 10, 1862. Stopping at Hampton to pick up Commander David Dixon Porter, the ship continued toward Florida. Fired upon and struck on the port side-wheel by Confederate guns at Shipping Point, Virginia, the *Lane* returned to Hampton Roads for repairs that took two days. Upon reaching Key West, the *Lane* became the flagship of Porter's Mortar Flotilla preparing for the Union assault on New Orleans. Leaving Key West for

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22. *Copies of Correspondence with the Navy Department Relative to the Revenue Cutters, 1861-65* (Washington, D.C.: Board of Review, Bureau of Pensions, June 29, 1914), 24.

23. Donald L. Canney, *U.S. Coast Guard and Revenue Cutters, 1790-1935* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1995), 28.



*The modern incarnation of the original USRMCS Harriet Lane is the Medium Endurance Cutter (WMEC) 903 Harriet Lane. The first Lane, a "presidential yacht," has maintained a maritime presence in this and other ways for 150 years.*

New Orleans on March 6, the ship provided fire support for Admiral David Farragut's run by the Confederate forts below the city. After accepting the surrender of the forts above New Orleans on April 29, the ship repaired to Florida to assist in the reoccupation of the Navy Yard at Pensacola.

Returning to the Mississippi River, the *Lane* and Porter's Mortar Flotilla supported Farragut's dash past the Confederate batteries at Vicksburg, Mississippi, in an effort to clear the length of the river for the Union. Failing in this endeavor, Farragut returned past Vicksburg's guns, and his weary squadron retired to Pensacola to rest and refit. After a brief respite, the *Harriet Lane* returned to Mobile Bay for blockading duty and then was ordered west as part of the Union invasion force headed for the Gulf Coast island city of Galveston, Texas.

On October 3, 1862, the *Harriet Lane*, along with the ships *Westfield*, *Owasco*, *Clifton*, and *Henry James*, opened a bombardment of Galveston and landed a small detachment of the 42nd Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry. Though the squadron did not occupy the city, its guns effectively denied the port to the Confederacy. This

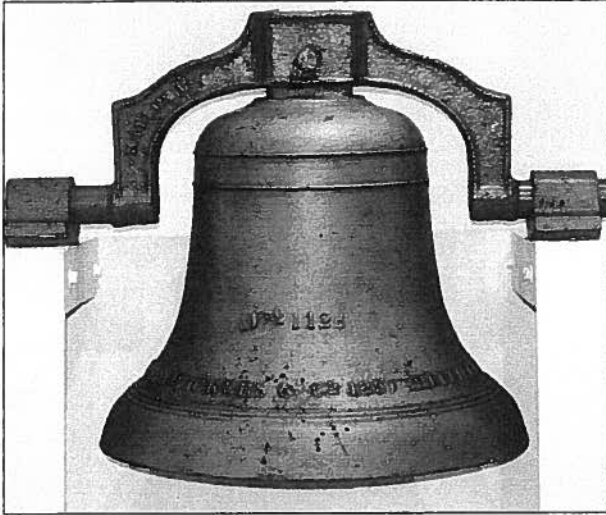
stalemate was not to last long, however. The dynamic Confederate General John Bankhead Magruder arrived at Galveston on November 29 and immediately planned a daring venture to rout the Union troops and either sink or capture their ships.

Early on January 1, 1863, Magruder's joint naval and land forces launched their attack on the Union forces. Stymied on land by the well-entrenched Massachusetts men, the Confederates' only hope was in capturing or sinking all the Union warships. In this effort, they received unexpected help when the flagship *Westfield* ran aground while maneuvering. While the *Lane* fought valiantly and held the Confederates at bay for some time, sinking a cotton-padded steamer (referred to as a "cotton clad"), eventually Confederate infantry from other steamers managed to board the ship, overwhelming its crew. The *Lane*'s captain, Commander Jonathan Wainwright,<sup>24</sup> and first officer, Lieutenant Commander Edward Lea, were killed in close combat with the boarders, with Lea's father, Confederate Major Albert Lea, serving on Magruder's staff, kneeling beside him as he expired.<sup>25</sup>

24. Commander Wainwright was the grandfather of General Jonathan Wainwright, who surrendered Corregidor, in the Philippines, to the Japanese during World War II.

25. Other sources suggest that Lea's father found him wounded on the deck and after speaking with his son, hurried off to find medical help. Edward Lea then died before his father was able to return. See Edward T. Cotham Jr., "If Stones Could Speak: Civil War Monuments in Galveston," unpublished monograph, n.d.





*Little remains of the Harriet Lane today. The ship's bell (above) is now in the Museum of Southern History. A pier mirror (right), now in a private home, is thought to be one auctioned off in Galveston by her Confederate captors along with another mirror.*



After its capture, the *Lane* served ineffectually in the Confederate Army's Marine Department of Texas before being sold in May 1864 to Houston merchant T. W. House for "fifteen hundred thousand dollars, Confederate scrip."<sup>26</sup> House removed the masts and guns<sup>27</sup> to lighten the ship and converted it into a blockade-runner, at the same time renaming it *Lavinia*. Although closely watched by the Union blockading squadron, itself anxious to retrieve the ship, the *Lavinia*, commanded by Captain W. H. Fleig,<sup>28</sup> slipped past the Union steamer *Katahdin* on the night of April 30 and escaped to Havana with a cargo of cotton intended to pay for a consignment of arms and ammunition waiting there. The ship remained trapped in Havana by Union blockaders until the end of the war.

After the war, the *Harriet Lane*'s first captain, John Faunce, convinced the Revenue Marine to recover the ship from Cuba. Although Faunce was

able to tow the ship back to the United States, he found it to have deteriorated so badly as to be beyond cost-effective repair. The ship was then sold to a consortium (including one Nehemiah Gibson), which removed the steam engines and

26. T. W. House was the father of "Colonel" Edward M. House, an adviser to President Woodrow Wilson (1912–20). U.S. Navy Department, *Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies in the War of the Rebellion* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1906) vol. 21, 45.

27. U.S. Navy Department, *Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies in the War of the Rebellion* 21:226.

28. Fleig Family website: [www.fleig.org/CaptFleig](http://www.fleig.org/CaptFleig)

rebuilt the ship in East Boston as a bark. Renamed the *Elliott Ritchie*, the ship carried cargo out of Boston until March 13, 1884, when off of Pernambuco, Brazil, it began taking on water. A British ship, the *Galgate*, rescued the crew from the foundering ship. The abandoned vessel was set afire to help sink it.<sup>29</sup> Much of the cargo of pine lumber eventually washed ashore south of Pernambuco.

Not surprisingly, the story of the *Harriet Lane* failed to disappear along with the ship. One of most famous Revenue Marine cutters, the *Harriet Lane* lives on through the many vivid narrations of its story, in subsequent U.S. Coast Guard namesakes, and through the few remaining artifacts of the ship itself. The *Lane*'s story has been retold many times, in many places. In addition to fame as a revenue cutter, it became one of the most frequently mentioned U.S. Navy ships of the Civil War, along side the *Monitor*, the *Kearsarge*, and the *Hartford*. Its name was carried on by two successors: the U.S. Coast Guard's Active-Class patrol boat commissioned in 1927 and its current incarnation, the Coast Guard's Medium Endurance Cutter *Harriet Lane* (WMEC-903), commissioned in 1984.

Physical remains of the ship are harder to come by. Much of the original Revenue Marine outfitting was tossed over board into Pamlico Sound in the desperate fight to save the ship after it grounded in 1861. What survived was warehoused after the navy took possession and later reused on the cutter *Cuyahoga*. The new furnishings supplied by the navy and the ship's officers fell into Confederate hands at Galveston, and only a few of these pieces have survived to the present. Most notable among these is the ship's bell. Removed from the *Lane* after its capture, the

bell made its way to Houston, where it served as a school bell at the city's Fannon School. After the school burned in 1900, its board donated the bell to the local chapter of the United Daughters of the Confederacy. Subsequently loaned to the Texas Naval Museum and housed on board the world's only surviving dreadnought battleship, the USS *Texas*, the bell was later relocated to Houston's Heritage Museum. In 1997, UDC loaned the bell to the Museum of Southern History in Sugarland, Texas, for display in an exhibition on the battle of Galveston.

The other significant piece of the *Harriet Lane* to survive the war was a mirror, now in private hands in Houston. This handsome and historic mirror, originally decorated at the top with the Union shield and an eagle, is shown in the accompanying photograph. At some point after its removal from the ship, ardent secessionists detached the shield and eagle, probably rather forcibly, from it.

Nor did the story end for the original Revenue Marine crew when the *Lane* was transferred to the Navy. Starting even before the Civil War, the officers of the ship petitioned the Congress to pay them the difference between their meager Revenue Marine salaries and those of comparable officers in the better-paid United States Navy.<sup>30</sup> While on duty off Paraguay, the officers were involuntary *ex officio* members of that service and felt they deserved to receive equal pay for equal work. Congress finally granted the officers their due on July 14, 1870, when President Ulysses Grant signed "A Resolution for the Relief of Captain John Faunce and others, officers of the Revenue-Cutter *Harriet Lane*" into law.<sup>31</sup> It had only taken 12 years.

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29. Edwin L. Dunbaugh and William duBarry Thomas, *William H. Webb, Shipbuilder* (Glen Cover, N.Y.: Webb Institute of Naval Architecture, 1989), 78.

30. U.S. Congress, Joint Resolution for the Relief of Captain John Faunce and Others, Officers of the Revenue Cutter *Harriet Lane*, *Journal of the Senate of the United States of America*, 35th Cong., 2nd sess., December 22, 1858.

31. 41st Cong. 2nd sess., *Congressional Globe*, July 15, 1870, 771.