

# The Muse

Newsletter of the Slater Memorial Museum  
Summer 2010



## Maritime Norwich

The first in a series on the city's  
illustrious seafaring history.

Many thanks to Diane Norman, the Norwich Historical Society and the Connecticut Humanities Council for research and financial support for the Norwich Heritage Partnership which led to this article.

The Slater Museum's efforts to uncover and deploy the remarkable collections of fine and decorative art and artifacts held at several Norwich institutions to interpret and present the city's history must include an examination of the Winship clan, of which Raymond Baily Case (1889-1980) was a member. Mr. Case left objects to the Slater Museum from the Winships that tell the story of Norwich's seafaring age. Many NFA alumni remember "Chief" Case, as he was affectionately called, as a science and math teacher. The Slater Museum remembers him as an avocational historian whose rigor in documenting his own deeply-rooted Norwich family benefits researchers today

Ray Case's great grandfather, Thomas Davis Winship was born October 9, 1795, the son of Thomas Winship of New York and grandson of the seafarer, Captain Samuel Freeman of Norwich. The connection is significant because Thomas Davis Winship would set sail on his own seafaring career at the age of eleven on his maternal grandfather's brig *Dove*. His mother's name is still to be identified with certainty by present-day researchers.

A brig is a vessel with two square rigged masts. During the "Age of Sail", (from the 16th to the mid 19th

century), brigs were seen as fast and maneuverable and were used as both naval war ships and merchant ships. They were especially popular in the 18th and early 19th centuries. Brigs fell out of use with the arrival of the steamship because they required a relatively large crew for their small size and were difficult to sail into the wind. Brigs should not to be confused with brigantines which are rigged differently. A brig is usually built on a larger scale than the schooner, and often is nearly as large as the full-sized, three-masted ship. Brigs vary in length between 75 and 165 ft with tonnages up to 480. Historically most brigs were made of wood, although some later brigs were built with hulls and masts of steel or iron.

Brigs were used as small warships carrying about 10 to 18 guns. Because of their speed and



Example of a late 18th century brig.

(Continued on page 3)

## A Message from the Director



If you are a frequent reader of mail from the Slater, you're well aware that we will be closed July and August to accommodate the exciting construction going on outside my window. While we are sorry to inconvenience our Friends and visitors, we're confident that the wait for our re-opening will be well worth it. Staff will be working all summer to re-install entire long-standing exhibitions with newly uncovered objects and information. On a sad note, we must bid adieu to our Administrative Assistant, Elisha Sherman, to whom we wish all the best. If you find you need to contact us during the summer, please be patient. We'll be working away from our desks a great deal but will make every effort to return phone calls on a daily basis. In this issue, you'll have a taste of some of our ideas for refreshing the Slater's permanent exhibitions.

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### The Slater Museum Needs Your Help!

As we prepare for construction over the coming year, the museum staff is still in need of the following items to help ensure the safety of the collection:

Clean blankets and sheets  
Packing paper  
Bubble wrap

If you would like to donate any of the above, please call  
860-425-5563 to arrange your delivery.  
Thank you to those who have already dropped off items!

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Museum Director – Vivian F. Zoë

Newsletter editor – Geoff Serra

Contributing authors: Vivian Zoë, Leigh Smead and Patricia Flahive

Photographers: Leigh Smead, Vivian Zoë

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(Continued from page 1)

maneuverability, they were popular among pirates. Their use stretches back before the 1600's and during the 1800s they were involved in noted naval battles such as the Battle of Lake Erie, War of 1812 (U.S.S. *Niagra*, captained by Oliver Hazard Perry) and the brig U.S.S. *Oneida* upon which James Fenimore Cooper was a midshipman. The H.M.S. *Beagle* was built as a brig (1820) for the Royal Navy and was deployed to survey the coasts of South America, Australia, and Africa. Later, a mizzen mast was added to increase maneuverability in the shallow coastal waters she would explore for the five-year voyage of Charles Darwin.

Several sources report that Andrew Robinson built the first ship dubbed a "schooner." Launched in 1713 from Gloucester, Massachusetts, the ship was said to "scoon" or skim on the water. The schooner has two or more masts, most traditionally gaff rigged, and sometimes carrying a square topsail on the foremast. Schooners carrying square sails are called square-topsail schooners.

The schooner's ability to glide across the waters with superior speed and admirable grace is due to its construction. The schooner has two or more masts. Traditionally, a schooner is gaff-rigged, which means it also has a square topsail on the front mast. The schooner's sails run the length of the deck, enabling it to catch the wind at a closer angle. The placement of the sails allows the ship greater maneuverability. Square-rigged ships have to sail in front of the wind and can turn to catch the wind, but they cannot command the wind like a schooner.

The histories of the American Revolution and Privateers are intimately interwoven. Schooners were



**The launch of the five-masted Schooner Governor Ames from Waldoboro, Maine**

commissioned for privateers, or government-sanctioned piracy. They were also favored for running blockades because of their easy maneuverability. British warships succeeded in destroying much of New England's fishing fleet, but the schooners often survived because of their speed.



**Jean Lafitte (ca. 1776 – ca. 1823) was a pirate and privateer in the Gulf of Mexico in the early 19th century.**

The schooner may be distinguished from the ketch by the placement of the mainsail. On the ketch, the mainsail is flown from the most forward mast; thus it is the main-mast and the other mast is the mizzen-mast. A two-masted schooner has the mainsail on the aft mast, and therefore the other mast is the fore-mast. Schooners were more widely used in the United States than in any other country. Two masted schooners were and are most common. They were popular in trades that required speed and windward ability, such as slaving, privateering, blockade-running and off shore fishing. They also came to be favored as pilot vessels, both in the United States and in Northern Europe.

Schooners were often used to transport slaves, including *La Amistad*, the 19th-century two-masted schooner that was built in the United States but owned and operated out of Cuba. In July of 1839, *La Amistad's* crew was transporting African slaves from Havana to another Cuban port when the slaves revolted against their captors. The ship was later captured by the United States Navy, but *La Amistad* became an important symbol in the anti-slavery movement.

The schooner *Hannah*, out of Marblehead, Massachusetts was the first armed American naval vessel of the American Revolution and is claimed to be the founding vessel of the United States navy. The



**Chelsea Landing, Norwich**

*Hispaniola* from Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island* was a schooner, as was the *We're Here* in Rudyard Kipling's *Captains Courageous*.

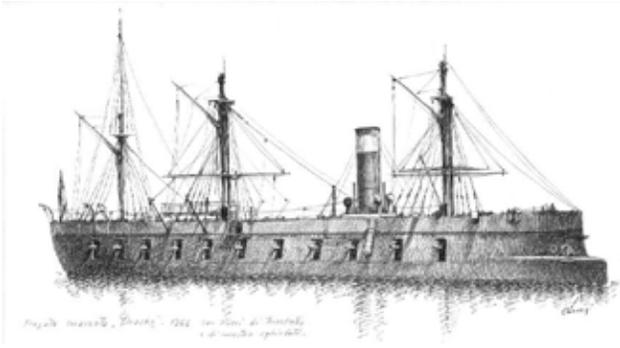
Essex Massachusetts is seen as having been the most significant shipbuilding center for schooners. By the 1850s, over 50 vessels a year were launched from 15 shipyards in Essex. Records of shipping out of Norwich, Connecticut are described in Frances Manwaring Caulkins' *History of Norwich* as early as 1730 and include trade voyages to "West India" and Ireland. Caulkins states that voyages to Ireland probably ended there, with the ship being constructed in Norwich where timber was plentiful and sailed to the purchaser. By 1740, the town voted to build a "highway" to the (Chelsea) Landing – the area we now call the harbor because of the burgeoning business there. We know that ships important to Connecticut's Revolutionary War effort were built for the State and Congress by Norwich captains and shipyards. The privateer *Governor Trumbull*, built at Willets Shipyard with at least 18 guns, made several significant captures before being captured herself. During the War for Independence, in addition to building privateers, it was common for states to sell "prizes" of battle – captured ships – or re-name them and return them to battle against their original owners. The ship's figurehead was an image of the Governor with his foot upon a cannon and sword drawn, an American flag as a backdrop. At her launch, the *Governor Trumbull* was grounded in the Thames River and it took two days to get her underway. The U.S.S. *Confederacy*, also built by Jedediah Willett, had a history deeply entangled with the Tories. She was a 36-gun frigate, launched November 8, 1778

and constructed of oak harvested in Salem from land confiscated from the Loyalist William Browne. Her first voyage was to France with august passengers including the American Ambassador to France and Spain John Jay and the French Ambassador to the U. S. Count de Gerard. In a 1779 storm off New Foundland, she rolled, lost her masts, but managed to limp to Martinique for repair. One wonders what would have become of the young country's independence efforts had John Jay been lost at sea! Even more confounding is that men who experienced shipwrecks boarded the next available transport and sailed again. Jay left Martinique aboard *L'Aurore*. On her next voyage to obtain provisions and supplies for the U.S. war effort, despite her own 40 guns, she was captured by the British who pressed her into service as a convoy escort. One hundred years later, Frances Caulkins found references that the crew who worked to build the *Confederacy* included members of the indigenous tribes with names like Uncas.

A frigate is a warship of varying sizes, built for speed and maneuverability. Frequently described as "frigate-built", these could be warships carrying their principal battery of carriage-mounted guns on one or two decks and with auxiliary smaller on the forecastle and quarterdeck. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, a frigate was full-rigged, square-rigged on all three masts, used for patrolling and escort. According to the British Admiralty frigates had at least 28 guns, carrying their principal armament upon a single continuous deck - the upper deck, while ships-of-the-line possessed two or more continuous decks bearing batteries of guns. Frigates did not carry guns (or have any gunports) on their lower decks. They usually did additionally carry smaller carriage-mounted guns on their quarter



**The USS Confederacy**



**Example of a mid 19th century armored frigate**

decks and forecastles (the superstructures above the upper deck).

Beginning about 1858 the British and French navies created the armored frigate, an ironclad warship, which for a time was the most powerful vessel afloat. The term “frigate” was used because such ships still mounted their principal armament on a single continuous upper deck. In modern navies, frigates are used to protect other warships and merchant marine ships, especially as anti-submarine combatants and merchant convoys.

About the Revolutionary War and the city, Caulkins writes that “The most extensive shipping firm in Norwich was that of Howland & Coit. Jabez and Hezekiah Perkins were among the earliest cruisers of the war. The latter made a successful voyage to Holland and France in the letter-of-marque sloop *Maria*, of six guns, owned by Howland & Coit. Capt. William Wattles performed several gallant exploits in a small privateer sloop belonging to Norwich, called the *Phenix*. In one of his expeditions he took a brig from Europe, with valuable cargo, and sold the whole in Carolina before coming home. Unfortunately he was at last taken by the enemy and carried to Halifax, where most of his men languished and died in the terrible Mill-Island prison, victims of close confinement and starvation. At a later period of the war, Capt. Wattles was in command of the privateer *Comet*, and in March, 1782, on a return voyage from the West Indies, was captured a second time by the enemy. He was however soon exchanged, and in July of that year sailed for Amsterdam in ‘the remarkable fast sailing and every way complete Letter of Marque brigantine *Thetis*.’ This was a prize vessel, fitted out

by Howland & Coit, and sent on a trading voyage to the Texel.

“The privateering business was pre-eminently one of uncertainty and hazard; Strikingly varied with quick success and sudden reverse. Most of the adventurers from Norwich and New London were captured, imprisoned and exchanged during the war, and some of them more than once; for no sooner were they released from bonds than they were ready for another chance,-acting ever upon the obstinate principle of *up and at them again*.”

The Letter of Marque to which Caulkins refers is defined by many sources as “a license to a private citizen to seize property of another nation” or “An official, written permit allowing pirates to plunder enemy ships.” These were bestowed upon the Privateers.

Caulkins’ *History of Norwich* paints a picture of seafaring at the time between 1776 and 1783 as one of victories, captures, “prizes”, storms, gales, loss, drowning, dramatic escapes (often by midnight swims) and sinking one’s own ship to avoid its capture.

One of the most important and thrilling Revolutionary era stories related to Norwich’s seafaring past is that of captain Robert Niles. In July 1775, Benjamin Huntington of Norwich and John Deshon of New London purchased a schooner, brought her to Norwich, refitted her and re-named her *The Spy*. It was on this ship that in 1778 Captain Niles carried to France the



**The infamous pirate Blackbeard fighting a battle at sea**

treaty between that country and the young United States, sealing support for U.S. independence.

Thomas Winship of New York may have been in the shipping business there. Captain Joseph Winship of Norwich was a relation of Thomas who owned and captained a trading vessel that plied the waters

**Slater Museum's *Around the World on the Yacht Eleanor: The Slaters' Grand Tour* exhibition is recognized**

Now in its 60th year, the Connecticut League of History Organizations' Award of Merit aims to recognize the care, thought and effort invested in these contributions and to inspire and encourage others by acknowledging exceptional contributions to state and local history.

The award presentation and reception was held June 7 at the Old Satae House in Hartford. CLHO Executive Director Priscilla Brendler and Awards Committee Chair Chris Dobbs, Executive Director of the Noah Webster House, were on hand to distribute the awards.

The Slater Museum is grateful for this recognition, and would like offer its sincere thanks to all staff and volunteers who contributed to the Grand Tour exhibition's success.



**Museum Director Vivian F. Zoë and Assistant Director Leigh Smead accept the CLHO Award of Merit**

between New London and the West Indies in the 1740's to the mid 1760's. In October 1765 Captain Joseph and his son sailed to South America, but in a storm were drowned. Joseph, Jr. was eleven years old. Other family connections include Captain Theophilus Yale who died at sea off the coast of Valparaiso December 30, 1819. George Winship died at sea (year unknown) at the age of twenty-two, having fallen from a mast.

Ray Case's great, great, great grandfather, Captain Samuel Freeman is also mentioned in Caulkins' *History of Norwich*: "The schooner *Commerce*, commanded by Samuel Freeman, bound to Martinico, was taken by the privateer 'L'Esperance', within an hour's sail of her port, and a prize-master with four men put on board. Capt. Freeman with a part of his crew were left with them. Watching his opportunity, he rose upon his captors, and after an obstinate resistance, in which one man was killed and others wounded, succeeded in retaking the vessel. Capt. Freeman in the conflict received three severe flesh-wounds from a cutlass. Unfortunately the privateer discovered that the *Commerce* was altering her course, and gave chase, compelling the captain at last to run the vessel ashore, among the breakers on the east side of Dominique, where she went to pieces."\* Caulkins does not say what became of Captain Freeman.

Captain Freeman commanded the Brig *Dove* in 1809 bound for Surinam with a crew mostly from Norwich and most likely again included young Thomas Davis Winship. Other destinations included Trinidad, Demerary and St. Bartholomew. Merchant ships carrying goods for trade from New England were busy in southern waters at this time. In the Barbadoes cattle and horses were especially desirable. Horses lives were short due to the oppressive heat and the heavy work in the cane fields requiring a constant fresh supply. The West India fleet belonging to Norwich returned carrying rich cargoes such as sugar, molasses, rum, and other goods. Storms, pirates, and sickness took tolls on the seamen and often ships went down without a trace and families never heard another word.

Thomas Davis Winship received his Seamen's Protection Certificate at age fifteen at the Customs House in New London on June 5, 1809 just prior to shipping out with Captain Freeman. He was described



**Artistic rendering of a cabin boy on a ship peeling potatoes.**

as 5'7" tall with a light complexion. (See portrait). The following year Thomas' name appears on the New London Crew List as a seaman on the Brig "Dove", destination Liverpool, England. He departed Nov. 21, 1810 under the command of Christopher Colver, of Norwich.

According to Raymond B. Case, donor of the Winship items to Slater Museum Thomas Davis Winship was a privateer in the War of 1812 aboard the Brig *General Armstrong* under the command of Samuel Chester Reid, a Norwich native. He fought in the Battle of Fayal Sept. 26, 1814, the neutral Portuguese port in the Azores. Three British ships, the *Carnation*, the *Rotas* and the *Plantaganet* were transporting troops to New Orleans. Rather than being captured by the British the crew of the *General Armstrong* scuttled the ship and escaped to safety, later sailing in a Portuguese brig for Amelia Island. On August 11, 1812 Thomas Davis Winship was captured at sea by the British ship *HMS Emulous* and imprisoned at Halifax, Nova Scotia. He was released October 9, 1812, recaptured by the Privateer *Lewis* and sent to Boston for exchange per order of Admiral Sir J. B. Warren.

At the age of 20, the younger Thomas returned to the Brig *Dove* out of New London and sailed to Cayenne on November 9, 1815. Six of the crew members were from Norwich and were under the command of Walter Lester of Norwich. The following year in November Thomas was described on the New London Crew List as having brown hair and standing 5'11", having grown 4" in 6 years. He was a crew member on the Brig *Hope* whose destination was Guadeloupe. The Captain was George Gilbert of Norwich. On this ship there were another six shipmates from Norwich, one

of whom was John Yale, age 25. It was John's sister, Phila, who Thomas married November 17, 1817 in Norwich. Their marriage is recorded in the Norwich Vital Records. The Yales were a seafaring family.

In 1819 he was first mate of the Brig *Fame*, a whaler. On this voyage he "took" a whale off Gibraltar which entitled him to a certificate stating that he was now able to "dance with daughters and wives of Nantucket men". \* He was, however, married and now the father of two children.

The years following 1820 until his untimely death in 1846 are largely undocumented with the exception of the Slater Museum items. From these items and documents the blanks can be filled in somewhat. An 1836 letter written to Captain Davis by "Raynor & Pond" located at 186 South Street, Manhattan (sic), New York City gives instructions as to fares, etc. The company was a large wholesale grocer business in Manhattan at that time.

In November 1836 Captain Winship was given orders by Raynor & Pond to collect passage money from all the passengers on his brig before leaving the port, which was at that time docked in Jacksonville, Florida. This was during the Mexican-American War (1846-1848) and the newspapers kept the population anxious about safety and economic conditions. Raynor & Pond were definite in their demand for payment, including the request for denominations no smaller than \$5 and \$10. Passage rates charged were about \$20 per person and on one voyage, there were 21 passenger charges. The brig was also loaded with timber and was sailing to Boston where all would be discharged. Captain Winship was advised that his



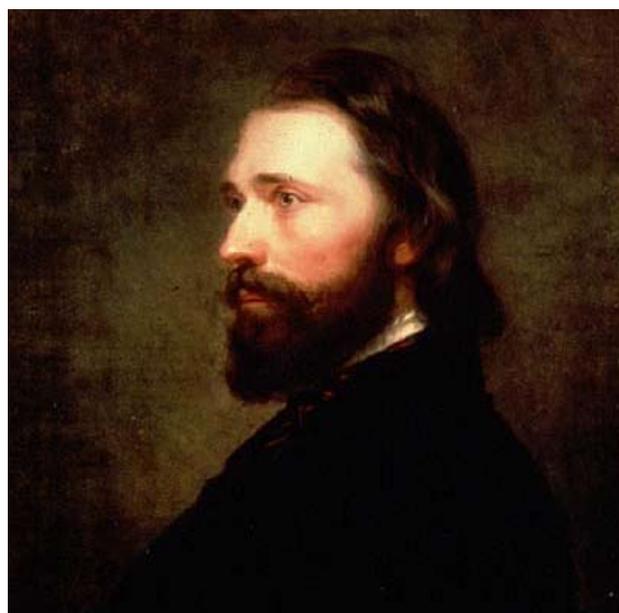
**The Brig General Armstrong**

pilot, Capt. Wightman, was to take no risks in getting to sea. The Second Seminole War was underway in Florida and the Battle of Wahoo Swamp took place on November 26<sup>th</sup> 1836. Possibly this issue caused concern for the brig's safety. Only a month earlier, Captain Winship had been a passenger on board the steamboat *William Gibbons* when it was wrecked off the coast of North Carolina near Body Island. According to a report in the *New York Courier* and published in the *Evening Journal* Sat. November 12, 1836, after the passengers were successfully landed, some of the crew attempted to rescue the baggage and cargo. The first mate, Joshua Andrews was suspected of stealing watches, rings, breast pins and other jewelry and was under surveillance. He was seen taking fistfuls of jewelry from his pockets and throwing them into the sea. It was at that point that Captain Winship collared him, threw him down and taxed him with the thefts. Two of the watches were found in his possession. He denied the charges, but later admitted that he had broken open one box which contained the jewelry. He was arrested, appeared in court in North Carolina and was sent to prison. Captain Winship was the principal witness.

Another letter from the ship brokers Fitch Brothers of Marseilles in 1841 gives Captain Davis sailing orders. The principals were Douglas, William and Asa Fitch Jr., Norwich natives from Bean Hill. Fitch Brothers & Co. was enormously successful in the mercantile business in Marseilles. Frances Caulkins asserted that "Nearly all the American Vessels and American produce sent from ports in the union to Marseilles, were consigned to the great firm. The United States government, also, found it necessary to appoint this house the agents of the Navy; and it had the supplying of all provisions, making all the payments & etc., of the American squadron stationed in the Mediterranean. This business gave Fitch Brothers & Co., a large capital to operate upon, and immense commissions every year ... Between 1830 and 1840, Fitch Brothers & Co. cleared annually from \$50,000 to \$100,000 by their commissions on vessels, cargoes and invoices of American produce consigned to them in Marseilles." Captain Winship, having known the Fitches through his Norwich relations, most likely spent many years plying the waters on behalf of Fitch brothers & Co. The general cargo contents consisted of cotton, rice, coffee, dogwood, hats and wine.

It is likely that while Captain Winship owned the brig *Carrier* during these lucrative years, he brought back household items such as an English drop leaf table made of San Domingo mahogany in 1810 from Spain. It was used as a dining room table by his descendants for five generations. He brought a tea set from Paris on one of his voyages. During this time Captain Winship sat for a portrait in oil on canvas by his friend Shepard A. Mount, a New York (long Island) artist. Mount was one of three brothers, all artists, whose work is represented in museums in Connecticut and New York. They clearly traveled frequently across the mouth of Long Island Sound and were known on both sides of it. Mount also made a sketch of Winship found in the Slater Museum's collection, framed with a letter "Entitling him to all the privileges of a Nantucket man".

Born in Setauket, Long Island, New York, Shepard Alonzo Mount and his brothers Henry Smith and William Sidney Mount, were all in the National Academy of Design. At age 17, Shepard was apprenticed in New Haven, Connecticut to a carriage builder who later transferred him to New York City where he reunited with his two brothers. They practiced drawing together, and in 1828, Shepard enrolled in the National Academy of Design. He lived briefly in Athens, Pennsylvania, and he also studied portraiture



**Portrait of Shepard Alonzo Mount, William Sidney Mount, 1847, Oil on canvas, collection of the Long Island Museum of American Art, History and Carriages**



**Thomas Davis Winship, Shepard Alonzo Mount, 1838, Collection of the Slater Museum**

with Henry Inman in New York City. His acclaimed 1838 portrait entry in the National Academy was a career turning point. He died from cholera at age 64.

In the portrait, Thomas is depicted as a handsome seafarer (probably age 46), with honey-blond hair, cradling a spyglass, a reference to his sailing trade. In the collection of the Slater Museum, the portrait is framed together with a gouache on board painting of his beloved brig *Carrier* which Winship captained, entering the port of Marseilles in 1841. The spyglass shown in the portrait is also held in the collection of the Slater Museum. About Thomas, donor Raymond Baily Case wrote “He . . . was quite a gallant of the old days. I remember a dignified dowager calling on my grandmother when I was a small child and wondering

when she stood before the portrait and softly called ‘Tommie, Oh, Tommie!’”

During Captain Winship’s seafaring career he sailed around the “Horn”, (Cape Horn, South America), trading with the natives of the South Pacific. Records of his voyages during the years 1820-1840 have not been found, but in 1846 Winship was acting as first mate on the ship *Superior* sailing from New York to Hull, England under the command of George Hoyt, a Norwich native, and most likely known by Winship for many years. During a violent storm Sept. 20<sup>th</sup>, on the return passage from Hull, Winship was swept overboard. Everything on deck was washed into the sea. The sad news was reported to Mrs. Winship in a letter dated October, 1846 from Captain Hoyt. It was also noted in the *New York Shipping & Commercial List* Nov. 11, 1846. The ship proceeded to Yarmouth, Cape Cod, leaky and damaged.

Captain Winship did not leave a will and Mrs. Winship soon left her home at Bean Hill to live with her son, Theophilus and daughter-in-law, Jerusha in the East Great Plains area, now, New London Tpke. In the Yantic Cemetery is the Winship plot with a granite obelisk commemorating Captain Winship’s tragedy at sea. Winship’s wife, Phila Yale, died twenty-seven years later and is buried in the family plot along with numerous other family members.



**Theophilus Winship, Alexander Hamilton Emmons c. 1840, Collection of the Slater Museum**

## Good Luck Elisha!

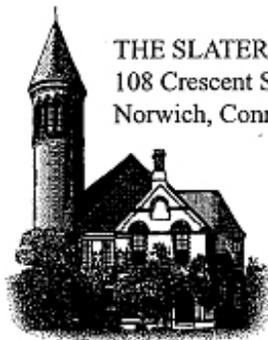


It is with much sadness that we say goodbye to Elisha Sherman, who has been a part of the team at the Slater Museum for more than six years.

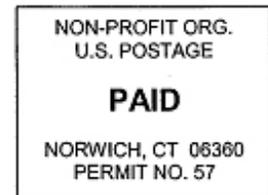
Our visitors will likely be familiar with Elisha's warm smile, as she has built an excellent rapport with the many constituents served by the museum including students, faculty and the public.

During her time here, Elisha has held many roles. A 1999 graduate of NFA, she started at the museum as a weekend host. Since then her duties have expanded, and she is now responsible for the museum's general administrative functions, including updating and maintaining museum memberships, creating marketing material and coordinating and managing student and adult volunteers. Her cheerfulness and positive attitude has been an asset to the museum, and she will be sorely missed.

Elisha currently resides in Plainfield with her fiance, Justin and their three-year-old daughter, Elora. We wish her the best of luck wherever life may take her.



THE SLATER MEMORIAL MUSEUM  
108 Crescent Street  
Norwich, Connecticut 06360



SERVICE CHANGE REQUESTED

