

3d CONGRESS.]

No. 2.

[2d SESSION.]

## CONSTRUCTION OF FRIGATES UNDER THE ACT OF MARCH 27, 1794.

COMMUNICATED TO THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, DECEMBER 29, 1794.

The Secretary of War, in obedience to the orders of the President of the United States, submits to the House of Representatives the following report respecting the frigates authorized by the "Act to provide a naval armament."

That the passing of the said act created an anxious solicitude that this second commencement of a navy for the United States should be worthy of their national character. That the vessels should combine such qualities of strength, durability, swiftness of sailing, and force, as to render them equal, if not superior, to any frigates belonging to any of the European Powers. Researches, therefore, have been made for the best principles of construction, and such proportions adopted as have appeared best, upon the most mature advice and deliberation.

The largest ships, of forty-four guns, will be constructed upon a scale to contain thirty cannons of the caliber of twenty-four pounds upon the gun deck. The others, of thirty-six, twenty-eight cannons, of the same caliber, upon the gun deck. The remaining force will be made up of twelve pounders and brass howitzers.

The frigates will be built of live oak and red cedar, in all parts where they can be used to advantage. These valuable woods afford the United States the highest advantages in building ships, the durability being estimated at five times that of the common white oak. Besides these woods, the best white oak, pitch pine, and locust, are directed to be used in the construction.

Expedients have been devised for seasoning the plank, as expressed in the letter of Joshua Humphreys, herewith submitted.

But the procurement of the live oak and cedar, being of Southern growth, has been retarded by the circumstances specified in the letter of the Commissioner of the Revenue.

The building of the ships has been directed in the several following ports of the Union, in order, as well to distribute the advantages arising from the operation, as to ascertain at what places they can be executed to the greatest advantage, to wit:

- One thirty-six at Portsmouth, New Hampshire;
- One forty-four at Boston;
- One forty-four at New York;
- One forty-four at Philadelphia;
- One thirty-six at Baltimore; and
- One forty-four at Portsmouth, or Norfolk, Virginia.

The following arrangement has been adopted for the building and equipment of the frigates:

1. All contracts for the principal materials of construction and equipment have been made in pursuance of law, under the direction of the Secretary of the Treasury.
2. All labor, and inferior materials, not otherwise provided by the Secretary of the Treasury, are to be procured by agents whose compensations are two and a half per cent. conformably to their instructions, hereunto annexed, marked No. 1.
3. The captains of the frigates are to superintend the construction and equipment, in pursuance of their instructions, No. 2.
4. The constructors, or master builders, are to be regulated by their general instructions, No. 3.

It has been endeavored to take these characters from the best qualified of their profession; and in order that the public should derive all the advantage of their whole time, they have been detached from all private pursuits by a liberal compensation, at the rate of two thousand dollars per annum. It is possible that, in one or two instances, *agreements for their services* might have been obtained at a rate somewhat lower; but the invidiousness of the distinctions of different rewards for men performing the same services would but ill comport either with the invariable feelings of the human heart, or the public service; they have, therefore, all been placed upon the same footing.

A clerk to each yard, or place of building, is to receive, issue, and to account for, all public property belonging to the ship, according to his instructions, No. 4, at the rate of seven hundred and fifty dollars per annum.

The progress which has been made in the business is generally stated in the letter of the Commissioner of the Revenue, and the letter of the captains and constructor of the port of Philadelphia, herewith submitted.

It is to be understood that no expenses were authorized until the appropriation of the 9th day of June last, although the act for building the frigates was passed the 25th day of March.

That few or no materials of any sort, either for construction or equipment, existed in their proper shape.

That every thing, if not to be created, was to be modified. That the wood of which the frames were to be made was standing in the forests; the iron for the cannon lying in its natural bed; and the flax and hemp, perhaps, in their seed. That the materials will be soon collected, and the building vigorously pushed, so that the frigates, according to the opinions contained in the documents herewith submitted, may be afloat in the course of the year one thousand seven hundred and ninety-five.

That, from the expenditures hitherto made upon the naval armament, no accurate judgment can be formed at present what further sums, if any, will be wanting to complete the same.

It is respectfully suggested, that the idea contained in the letter of the Commissioner of the Revenue, respecting the publicity of some of the measures upon this subject, merits consideration.

All which is respectfully submitted.

H. KNOX, *Secretary of War.*

DEPARTMENT OF WAR, *December 27th, 1794.*

*Instructions from the Secretary of War to the Agents, Superintendents, Constructors, and Clerks of the Yards, for building the frigates of the United States.*

No. 1. *To the Agents.*

SIR:

You having accepted of the agency of the ship of war to be built at —, are to consider the rules herein specified, as the general principles whereby to govern yourself in the execution of the agency.

1st. You are to provide all the artificers and laborers of all descriptions, excepting the constructor or master builder, necessary to build a ship of — guns, the number to be such, from time to time, as will be able to operate with the greatest effect; these workmen to be provided upon the best terms, by the day, week, or month, as you shall judge conducive to the public interests.

2d. You are also to purchase such materials for the construction and equipment of the said ship, as shall not otherwise be provided by special contracts, under the orders of the Secretary of the Treasury, and to pay all other incidental or contingent expenses.

3d. All the workmen and materials for building the said ship are to be obtained by you upon the estimate or requisition in writing by the constructor, countersigned by the captain or superintendent. Other articles, or labor, necessary for the rigging or equipping of the ship, are to be obtained by you upon the estimate of the principal artificer in each branch, and also countersigned by the captain.