

PLYMOUTH IN THE REVOLUTION: **The American Navy**

Simeon Sampson (1736-1789)

The first naval officer commissioned by the Massachusetts Provincial Congress was Captain Simeon Sampson of Kingston and Plymouth. He commanded the 16-gun brigantine *Independence*, built in nearby Kingston in 1776.

One of the first British ships he captured off Nova Scotia was the Loyalist supply ship *Roebuck*, captained by Plymouth Tory Gideon White. Sampson himself was captured soon after, when he engaged Captain Dawson of the Royal Navy at Halifax.

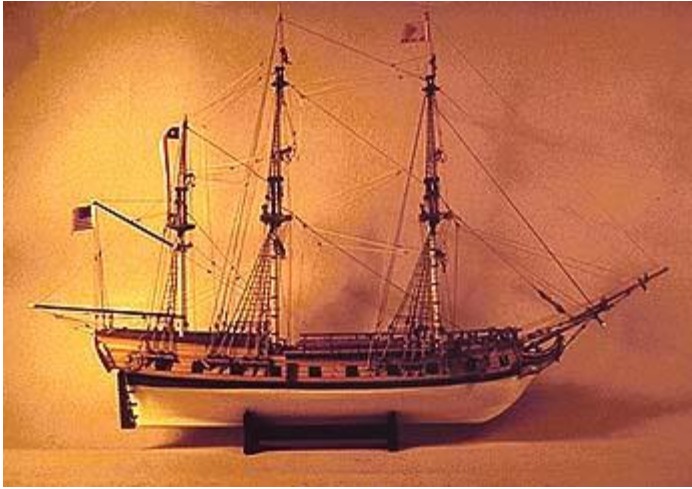
While captured officers were expected to surrender their swords, Dawson returned Sampson's sword in recognition of Sampson's courage. Sampson was later commissioned to command the Kingston-built ships *Hazard* and *Mars*.



Sword of Simeon Sampson

The Rattlesnake

In order to augment the small American navy, General Washington encouraged private citizens with fast vessels to pursue English ships. Privateers, as these privately-owned ships were known, harried the British fleet along the coast, capturing supply ships and obstructing military operation. Sailors on board privateers risked imprisonment if captured by the enemy, but they received a portion of the proceeds of the cargo from captured ships if they were successful.



Model of the *Rattlesnake*, built by Bob Weiss.

Several privateers were built locally, including the *Rattlesnake*, built in 1780 in Plymouth. She received her first commission on June 12, 1781, and sailed with 85 men and more than 14 guns. On her first - and only successful - cruise, she took more than a million dollars of British goods. The British ordered her captured.

The *Rattlesnake* was indeed seized the next year by H.M.S. *Assurance*, a 44-gun warship. She was sailed to England, taken into the Royal Navy, and renamed *Cormorant*.