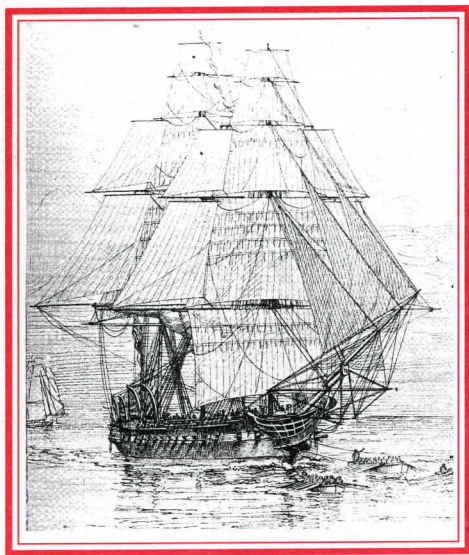


Channing

Moses H. Gulesian



and Old Ironsides

Moses H. Gulesian and Old Ironsides

By Arnold W. Dyer

© 1993 by Arnold W. Dyer
Falmouth, Massachusetts
All Rights Reserved

Published by Arnold W. Dyer, 1993
Printed by The Village Printer
North Falmouth, Massachusetts

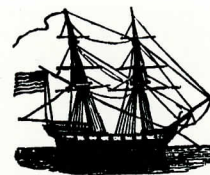
Credits:
Falmouth Enterprise
Not By Accident The Story of Moses H. Gulesian
by Irene H. Burnham
The Christopher Publishing House, Boston, Massachusetts, 1938.

Foreword

Millions of Americans have benefited by the few simple deeds of an unselfish, altruistic person, Moses Gulesian. For many years since my childhood, the principle of the following story has made a very lasting impression. In the present era of worldwide violence, hatred, lack of moral standards, and different kinds of abuse, the Gulesian story is refreshing. To the dedicated patriotism of this concerned citizen, we owe our eternal gratitude.

This private printing is a gesture of my appreciation to the many supporters of the Falmouth Historical Society books published in the last year.

A. W. D.



On July 16, 1992, I had the good fortune to view the Tall Ships Parade in Boston Harbor. The sight of the *USS Constitution* under way brought back memories of Moses H. Gulesian, a Falmouth summer resident who almost single-handedly saved "Old Ironsides" from demolition.

When Moses Gulesian in 1905 read the news that the U.S. Navy Department was considering destroying this warship launched in 1797, the patriotism of the Armenian immigrant for his new homeland was immediately aroused.

The newspaper quoted Secretary of the Navy Charles Bonaparte saying the old, decaying frigate was no longer needed and might be towed out to sea and used for target practice. Gulesian loved American history and was particularly interested in this ship because she had been built in Boston, his adopted home. Local craftsmen including Paul Revere had wrought much of her hardware. The ship had earned the world-famous name "Old Ironsides" in the War of 1812 when British cannon fire seemed to bounce off her sides.

Most sincere thanks for your
infinite help

Cernoblesky

12/12/93

such a horrible end as being used as a target. If it is a question of price I will raise my offer to \$15,000."
—M. H. GULESIAN TO THE JOURNAL.

Would Buy "Old Ironsides" To Save Ship From Ignominious End As Target At Sea

Bostonian's Patriotic Offer Ignored By Secretary Bonaparte.

Mr. Gulesian Says He'll Increase The Bid To \$15,000.

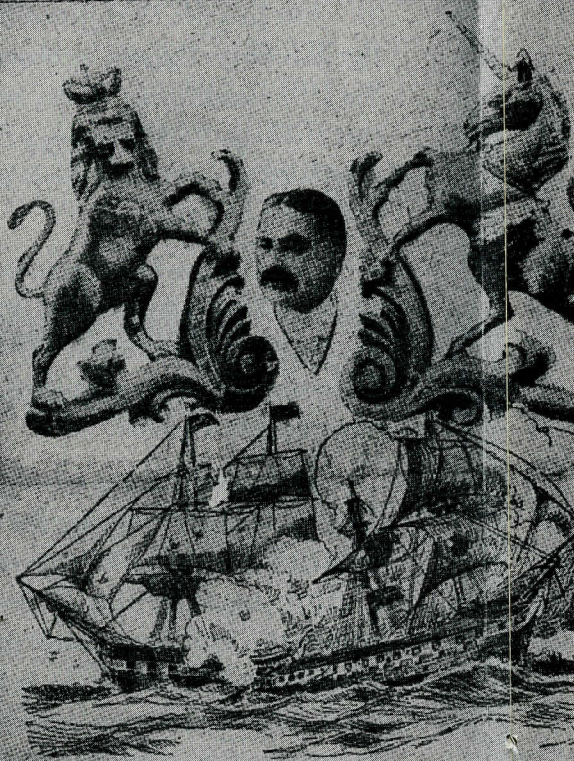
In Commodore Lawrence's immortal words, uttered as that great sea soldier lay dying in the midst of shot and shell on his battered vessel, "Don't give up the ship." M. H. Gulesian, whose patriotic telegram to Secretary Bonaparte offering to buy the *Constitution* electrified the country yesterday morning, expressed his determination last night of keeping up the fight to save the famous old relic from the ignominious fate suggested by the secretary of the navy.

Although he was born in Armenia, and the danger in which he had offered to save the *Constitution* is a reason to those here who boast of their ancestry and live on the "spirit of '76," but are so diffident about expending anything any more tangible in demonstrating their patriotism.

Resolves No Reply.

"I will not answer for the *Constitution*, 'Old Ironsides.' Will you sell?" was the remonstrative message Mr. Gulesian sent to Secretary Bonaparte Monday afternoon from the Parker House. Late in the evening the telegram was given to the press by the secretary in connection with the statement he had no authority to make the sale. As yet Mr. Gulesian has not been given the courtesy of a reply except through the press.

Anyone who has ever lived in the country, I believe, has seen a divided of



M. H. GULESIAN.

Who offered to buy the *Constitution* for \$10,000, and Old State House lion unicorn he once saved.

The next day Gulesian sent a telegram to the Navy Department offering to buy the frigate for \$10,000 and save her from destruction. "WILL GIVE \$10,000 FOR THE CONSTITUTION, OLD IRONSIDES. WILL YOU SELL?" the telegram read.

Gulesian's offer made headlines. In an interview with *The Boston Journal* the day after he sent his wire to the Navy, he said, "My only intention in making this offer of \$10,000 for the old *Constitution* was to save her from such a horrible end as being used as a target. If it is a question of price, I will raise my offer to \$15,000."

The Navy refused his offer, but said it would withhold action and allow Congress to decide the ship's fate. Gulesian's offer was made public by the Navy Department, and it sparked a campaign to save the ship. More than 30,000 people signed a petition. As a result, a year later Congress appropriated \$100,000 for repairs.

In 1915 an Old Ironsides Association was formed with Gulesian as its president. The directors included Henry Cabot Lodge, Calvin Coolidge, A. Lawrence Lowell and Mrs. Larz Anderson.

During the 1920's, however, the *Constitution* had again fallen into disrepair. To raise funds, school children were asked to save their pennies to repair the ship.

Some Falmouth residents today recall saving their pennies for this cause.

Perhaps as interesting as the story of saving the ship is the story of the foreign emigrant whose love for this country was that of an adopted child. Moses Gulesian was born in 1866 in Marash, a Syrian mountain city in western-central Asia. His family were Christians in the mighty Gregorian Church. There were five brothers, a sister and his parents. A strong family bond was broken when Gulesian at age seventeen left Marash with a caravan for the Syrian port of Alexandretta. He was an apprenticed coppermonger who with his cousins traveled by donkeys on a six-day trip to sell their wares. He was well aware of the many hardships in the journey including the danger of being robbed and attacked by roving Kurds.

At the start of the trip he secretly considered the idea of going on to the western world, about which he knew a little through letters received by a friend whose brother had gone to the land of freedom in America. In another excursion nine months earlier, Gulesian had made a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, and there he had been christened with a middle name "Hadji" which was a mark of honor that signified his visit. Memories were so strong that he knew now was the time to ship west. He wrote a letter to his family to be delivered by a

cousin on his return to Marash, and with his savings in his money belt and his few personal belongings, Gulesian set off for America.

A slow Russian ship took him to Smyrna, where he was delayed before sailing on to Palermo, Sicily and finally New York. When he arrived in this country in May 1883, he knew no language other than Armenian, and his money was about gone. But with his strong determination and aggressiveness, he found the brother of his Marash friend who helped him adjust to his new world.

After a few weeks in New York, he went to Worcester, Massachusetts, where he worked at his trade as a coppermonger. He enrolled at Worcester Academy to learn English. Gulesian had a keen business sense and made use of every opportunity to improve himself.

It was not long before his business in the copper trade enabled him to build a six-story factory on Waltham Street, Boston, in 1890. In 1891 he became a U.S. citizen.

The suffering in Armenia at the hands of the Turks prompted him not only to urge the entry of the Red Cross for relief, but to initiate the detailed proceedings to bring thirty-eight members of his family to America. He paid all expenses and brought them to

Boston where interim housing was provided in his factory.

In 1900 he was commissioned by the superintendent of public buildings to cast in heavy copper the wooden figures of the lion and the unicorn which adorned the east end of the roof of the Old State House. His home was on Commonwealth Avenue in Chestnut Hill where he installed the replaced wooden figures of the lion and unicorn.

Gulesian became very active in real estate after selling his copper business. He was interested in the dramatic arts and pursued this by operating the old Castle Square Theater for several years. He then built the St. James Theater on Huntington Avenue in Boston. It opened in 1912 at a reputed cost of almost a half-million dollars and was reported to be the most impressive and best-equipped theater in the country.

Gulesian served as an enlisted man in World War I, and in 1916 while he was stationed in Plattsburgh, New York, his wife of twenty-five years died. He and a daughter, Margaret Alice (Mrs. James L.) Beck, continued to live in their Commonwealth Avenue home.

In 1920 he married Grace Warner of Brookline. She was a member of a well-respected family and was a talented musical composer as well as one of Boston's



Waterside-Falmouth, Massachusetts 1925

finest pianists. Their home in Chestnut Hill was the setting of many musical events.

In Falmouth, Gulesian purchased Waterside, the large estate at the end of Shore Street. The house had been built by Frances Lathrop Beebe Fiske, a daughter of Falmouth's prominent James Madison Beebe. With the addition of adjoining property, the Gulesian estate covered about ten acres. This included homes for estate employees as well as barns and a large brick carriage house. A tower originally built for the water supply was enlarged to make an impressive windmill.

For several years the Gulesians were very active socially with their many friends and business associates.

Grace Warner Gulesian was invited to give a concert at the White House. She gave recitals in Falmouth, and Moses Gulesian is remembered as the host in a white full-dress suit.

The Depression of the 1930's took its toll on his vast holdings. He lost many of his properties, and not



Waterside-Falmouth, Massachusetts 1993

until information accidentally was given to his wife did she know they might lose their Commonwealth Avenue home. Moses' admiration for Grace was so great that he did not want to worry her about his financial situation. To soothe his frustration, she composed a song for him.

This melody was later instrumental in his return home after a mysterious disappearance. He suffered a loss of memory and returned to the Bowery in New York City where he had spent his first weeks in America. It was not until he heard Grace's melody

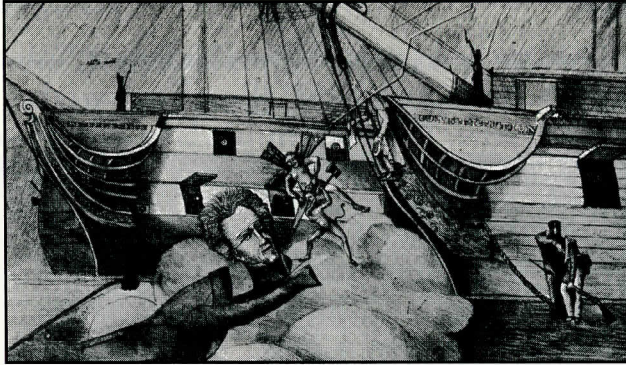
again that he was able to identify himself and return to his family. With the loving care of his wife, he regained his health and the strength to retrieve some of his lost wealth.

Gulesian never re-established his former financial position, however, and in 1937 Waterside was taken by bank foreclosure. This property was later sold to James F. Mooney, whose heirs are the present owners in 1993.

In his later years Gulesian lived in somewhat reduced circumstances. Death came on December 30, 1951, when Moses Hadji Gulesian was eighty-five.

The presence of the *USS Constitution* in the Parade of Tall Ships in 1992 and her existence today in her 196th year is a tribute to the patriotism of this rags-to-riches Falmouth resident.





An anti-Jackson political cartoon published in 1834, when a life-sized image of "Old Hickory" was installed as a figurehead on Old Ironsides' prow. There was also opposition because of a male figurehead bringing bad luck and the dislike of using a living person's effigy. Falmouth native, Capt. Samuel Worthing Dewey was Commander of a vessel out of Boston belonging to a firm whose Sr. partner was Henry Lincoln, also of Falmouth. Capt. Dewey took Mr. Lincoln up on his jokingly made offer of \$100. for cutting off the head of the Jackson effigy. After serving as the center piece at several banquets, the head was returned by Capt. Dewey to the Secretary of the Navy.

