

The "Navy Link" to St. Elizabeth Ann Seton



Shortly after the canonization of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton in Rome on September 14, 1975 by Pope Paul VI, the then Chief of Navy Chaplains, Monsignor John J. O'Connor (formerly John Cardinal O'Connor, the Archbishop of New York) took the initiative to proclaim Mother Seton "[Patroness of the Sea Services](#)" for Catholic men and women in uniform--the Navy, the Marine Corps, the Coast Guard, and the Merchant Marine. Admiral James D. Watkins, then Chief of Naval Personnel, collaborated closely with Rear Admiral O'Connor in that effort and in 1977 they struck a medal honoring Mother Seton because of her link to the Navy through her two sons, William and Richard.

William Seton was appointed Midshipman on the fourth of July in 1817. In February of 1818 he reported for duty aboard the USS INDEPENDENCE, and in July he was assigned to the USS MACEDONIAN which sailed from Boston later in the year on a cruise around Cape Horn to Valparaiso, Chile. While he was on this voyage, his mother died on January 4, 1821. In May of 1822 he was ordered to the USS CYANE. This voyage in the Mediterranean and along the coast of Africa lasted more than three years. Late in February of 1826 he was given his commission as Lieutenant in the U.S. Navy. In November he was ordered to the Sloop of War HORNET which was sent from Norfolk, Virginia to cruise the West Indian waters in search of pirates. He resigned as Lieutenant on July 5 of 1834, almost seventeen years to the day he was appointed Midshipman.

Richard Seton, the second son, was the Captain's clerk on the USS CYANE. The Navy has very little information to give about Richard Seton. For almost a year (June 1822 to April 1823), he was on duty with this ship off the coast of Africa, where the United States Government was supporting the American Colonizing Society in its efforts to found a free Negro Colony in Liberia. In a letter from the Reverend Jehudi Ashmun, an Episcopalian missionary in the area, we learn that Richard contracted a fatal fever while nursing the minister back to life. Shortly afterwards, Richard Seton died of this fever on June 26 of 1823 and was buried at sea.

Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton, Patroness of the Sea Services, pray for us.

Stained-glass window above of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton, gift of members of the U.S. Naval Academy Class of 1949, in memory of their classmate, the late Reverend Thomas J. Donoher, CDR, CHC, USN (1925-1977). United States Naval Academy.