A Quest for Identification

The following letter, loaned to The Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania through the courtesy of Mr. Lawrence C. Woods, Jr., is a sensitive portrayal of the feelings of a young midshipman far from home in wartime (1862):

U. S. Frigate
Constitution Oct 7th

Dear Cousin,

I received your letter and was glad to hear from you. I am seated at my desk waiting for the Drawing Master to come round to give us our first lesson in Drawing. He is a very savage looking Customer but I hope he is quiet and don't bite but here he comes and I say let him come. Good bye for the present.

Yours

Dick

Tuesday eve

Dear Cousin,

It is with pleasure I take up my pen to finish what I commenced at noon. When I am going to get home I can't tell but one thing is I cannot go home on next Christmas and I will not go home in February for if you see me at home in that month you may say I failed. We have had a sea storm here today. The waves dash up the ships side and she rocks (a thing that she scarcely ever does). My drawing Master was not cross like I thought he was. I went aloft this evening when the wind was blowing that hard that you could scarcely see and Oh how beautiful yet how Awful a storm at sea is. From the mainmast you can see the Atlantic's restless waves rolling away off to the red dingy horizon. I love to climb up as far as I can go and sit up there and think of Home. Wilson you do not know how a home is to you when you are 700 miles away and no hope of seeing it before two long years and perhaps not then. But I will not think of home now for I must leave all that is near to me some time and why not now. One of the only hopes I have is that I may get through and then that
God will spare my sinful life to serve my Country. When you write
tell me all the news and if you see any of our folks tell them that I
rec'd their letter this morning. But I must close as it is time for
evening study. I am very well and hope this miserable letter may find
you in the same way it left me.

I send my love to all and particularly to your Mother.

Your Aff Cousin
Dick

(Please burn this)

The identity of Midshipman Dick and his relationship to the
Shaw family, for whom Glenshaw is named, are clarified by Mrs. Dan
E. Tatam, nee Caroline Shaw, in a letter to her cousin, Mr. C. A.
McClintock, portions of which are quoted herewith:

"The enclosed letter is from Dickson Courtney Shaw, son of John
Shaw and Matilda Courtney, written to Wilson Shaw (cousin Wilson
who used to live on Morewood Ave.) while he was training at
Annapolis.

"The old Constitution was used as a training ship for years and
he was evidently aboard her. It is too bad that he doesn't put the year,
but just the month on his letter.

"Cousin Dick . . . was the D. C. Shaw of the D. C. Shaw whole-
sale grocers here . . . His last son, John Shaw, died a year ago (1965).

"Dickson Shaw's father was John Shaw, a younger brother of
your and my great grandfather, Thomas Wilson Shaw. Cousin Wilson
Shaw was the son of another brother, James, and was named for his
uncle Wilson (Thomas Wilson Shaw) . . ."

Caroline

May 7, 1966.

"Your Mother" is identified in the following note from Mr.
Lawrence C. Woods to his sister, Mrs. Francis C. Wood, the owner
of the original letter from Dick:

"I am returning with this the letter from Dick. It was obviously
written about 1862 to Wilson A. Shaw (Uncle Wilson) and the
reference to Wilson Shaw's mother was to Nancy Wilson Shaw, your
great-grandmother."
Midshipman Dick's letter with its ramifications is an interesting example of the unfolding of family history through letters and documents which have been preserved.