



National Archives and Records Administration

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Life-Saving Service Employees, 1855–1913

The Federal Government established unmanned life-saving stations along the eastern seaboard in 1848, following the rise of private efforts to save shipwrecked mariners and passengers via shore-based rescue and lifeboat stations. Congress formally created the Life-Saving Service in 1878 (20 Stat. 163), allowing the stations to be manned by full-time volunteer crews of station keepers and surfmen who were administered by the U.S. Revenue Marine (later known as the U.S. Revenue Cutter Service). In 1915 the Life-Saving Service merged with the Revenue Cutter Service to form the United States Coast Guard.

Official Register of the United States

The Federal government published the *Official Register of the United States* every other year beginning in 1816. Until 1907, the *Official Register* contains a list of virtually all employees of the Federal government.

1873–1905

Beginning in 1873, a table under the Department of the Treasury lists the lifesaving station superintendents and keepers for each regional district along with their job title, location of employment, state of birth, state from which appointed, and compensation. Over time, the number of regional districts grew and separate lists began for “Life-Saving Service” employees in the districts and “Office of Life-Saving Service” employees in Washington, DC. The latter included the general superintendent, assistant general superintendents, clerks, draftsmen, accountants, topographers, hydrographers, messengers, and civil engineers. Starting in 1877, each volume has an alphabetical name index. Beginning in 1895, the tables specify the county and congressional district from which each employee was appointed. Beginning in 1897, the lists of district employees include surfmen (the men who went into the water to perform the rescues) as well as higher-level officials.

1907–1913

During this period, the register provides only the name, title, and compensation for select employees, including principal central administrators, district superintendents, and a few other high-level district employees; surfmen are not listed. In addition to the short lists specific to the Life-Saving Service, each volume contains in alphabetical order by surname a one-line entry for each employee, including place of employment; place of birth; and county, state, and congressional district from which appointed.

Records of the United States Coast Guard (RG 26)

 Nominations of Life Saving Keepers, 1855–1910 (NC-31, Entry 259A). This series contains letters received and sent relating to nominations of keepers and their assistants, testimonials, notifications of appointments, oaths of office, requests for transfers, recommendations for promotion, resignations, complaints, petitions and reports of inspectors, death notices, testimonials on misconduct, and applications for and certification of medical inspections. It is arranged numerically by district and then alphabetically by surname.

___ **Record of Applications and Engagements of Surfmen, 1897–1898** (NC-31, Entry 258). This series lists the number of the district, grade classification, date application was sent to the Civil Service Commission, date of report of eligibility, date of reporting to the Commission, and comments.

___ **Articles of Engagement for Surfmen, 1878–1914** (NC-31, Entry 260). These records show lists of surfmen for each Life-Saving District as well as their terms of engagement and compensation. The articles may also include reports of changes in crew, along with reasons for the change, biographical information on new crew members, and medical inspection reports providing physical descriptions of the surfmen examined.

___ **Changes of Surfmen, 1878–1910** (NC-31, Entry 259B). This series contains letters received and sent relating to petitions of surfmen, testimonials, notifications of appointments, oaths of office, requests for transfers, discharge notifications, recommendations for promotion, resignations, complaints, petitions and reports of inspectors, death notices, testimonials on misconduct, reports of desertions, and applications for and certification of medical inspections. It is arranged numerically by district and then alphabetically by surname.

___ **Miscellaneous Applications, 1878–1897** (NC-31, Entry 259C). This series contains letters received and sent regarding application for employment at Life-Saving Stations, and requests for transfer to other Life-Saving Stations. It is arranged alphabetically by surname.

___ **Applications for Superintendents of Life Saving Districts, 1874–1900** (NC-31, Entry 259D). This series contains applications and nominations for the employment of superintendents and keepers at Life-Saving Districts, and oaths of office. It is arranged alphabetically by surname.

For more information, see the following reference report: *The Annual Reports of the Life-Saving Service, 1871–1913*.

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