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Passenger Lists
of
Vessels Arriving
at
Boston
1820-1891



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The records reproduced in the microfilm publication

are from

Record Group 36

Records of the Bureau of Customs

in the National Archives

PASSENGER LISTS OF VESSELS
ARRIVING AT BOSTON
1820-1891

On the 115 rolls of this microfilm publication are reproduced unbound Federal passenger lists of vessels arriving at the port of Boston from foreign ports, September 2, 1820-March 31, 1874, and January 1, 1883-July 29, 1891. Most of the documents are copies of the original passenger lists, 1820-74, received in the National Archives from the Immigration and Naturalization Service. Those for the period January 1883-July 1891 are the original passenger lists that were received from the Boston customhouse. The original lists dated before 1883 were destroyed in a fire at Boston in May 1894.

The lists are arranged chronologically by arrival date of vessel. When the documents were prepared for filming by the National Archives, they were numbered consecutively within each calendar year of arrival. This number is not a passenger-list or manifest number.

An act of March 2, 1819 (3 Stat. 489), provided that effective January 1, 1820, the captain or master of a vessel arriving at a port in the United States or in any of its territories from a foreign country was to submit a list of the passengers to the collector of customs in the district in which the vessel arrived. The act also provided that every collector of customs submit quarterly reports consisting of copies of passenger lists to the Secretary of State, who was required to submit such information at each session of Congress. The information was later published in the form of Congressional documents. An act of May 7, 1874 (18 Stat. 42), repealed the provisions of the legislation requiring collectors to send copies of passenger lists to the Secretary of State. Thereafter, collectors of customs were to send statistical reports only on passenger arrivals to the Department of the Treasury.

The lists normally give information about each passenger as to name, age, sex, occupation, the country to which he belonged, and the country of which he intended to become an inhabitant, and notations as to the number and cause of deaths on board. The law required that the lists be sworn to by the master in the presence of the collector or his deputy.

An alphabetical card index to names on passenger lists of vessels arriving at the port of Boston, 1848-91, prepared from passenger lists required by legislation of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, has been reproduced on microfilm (Microcopy 265). Another finding aid is an incomplete alphabetical card index to names of passengers arriving at Atlantic and Gulf coast ports, including Boston, 1820-74 (Microcopy 334).

The records reproduced on this microcopy and the indexes are part of Record Group 36, Records of the Bureau of Customs, in the National Archives.

In the same record group are some Boston customhouse records, including journals of and alphabetical indexes to vessel entrances, which also serve as finding aids to names of vessels and dates of arrival for most of the period 1874-91; and eight volumes of letters received by the Boston collector of customs relating to quarantine and immigration, 1884-99, in which there are names of some passengers.

Also in this record group is a series of eight bound volumes of quarterly transcripts of lists of names of passengers arriving at most Atlantic and Gulf coast ports, September 1819-December 1832, which includes names of passengers arriving at Boston, 1820-27. The volumes apparently were prepared in the Office of the Secretary of State from copies of lists or from the quarterly abstracts submitted by the collector of customs. Originally there were nine volumes, but volume 2 is missing.

Related records in Record Group 56, General Records of the Department of the Treasury, include letters received by the Secretary of the Treasury from the Boston collector of customs, 1833-69 (part of Microcopy 174); copies of correspondence of the Secretary with the Boston collector, 1789-1833 (part of Microcopy 178); and copies of letters sent by the Secretary to the Boston collector, 1833-47 (part of Microcopy 175); and others for the period 1847-1909. In the same record group are correspondence registers and indexes that include some entries for letters to Federal immigration authorities at Boston, ca. 1878-1900.

In Record Group 85, Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, is correspondence that contains some information relating to immigration through the port of Boston, 1882-1903; and passenger manifests for the period August 1891-December 1943 that were submitted to Federal immigration authorities at Boston in compliance with legislation enacted in 1882 and later (Microcopy T-843). Lists less than 50 years old are not available for reference purposes. In the same record group are two indexes to immigration passenger lists that can be made available provided all the entries relate to lists over 50 years old. One is a book index, April 1, 1899-September 14, 1940, arranged chronologically by arrival date of vessel, thereunder by class of passenger, and thereunder for the most part alphabetically by the first letter of the surname of the passenger; and the other is a card index, 1902-6, arranged alphabetically (Microcopy T-521).

Related published sources of information are reports of passenger arrivals submitted by the Secretary of State to Congress, 1820-70. His reports, published as Congressional documents,

indicate by port of arrival the number of passengers, nationality, and occupation, and sometimes age and sex. Only those for 1820 contain the names of passengers. Some of the reports are based on calendar years, but others are for report years ending September 30.

Comparable statements or reports, prepared and published by the Treasury Department, Bureau of Statistics, begin in 1867 and extend through Fiscal Year 1894. The statements for 1867-69 are included in the Annual Report of the Treasury Department for Fiscal Year 1869. The reports, also published as Congressional documents, indicate by district of arrival summary statistics on the age, sex, nationality, and occupation of the passengers. The details in the later reports are usually more complete.

Statistics on immigration from 1820 to 1910 have been published in volume 3 of the Reports of the Immigration Commission (S. Doc. 756, 61st Cong., 3d sess., Serial No. 5878, Washington, 1911).

The records reproduced in this microcopy were prepared for filming by Joyce D. Ciarrocchi, who also wrote these introductory remarks and provided the other editorial material.

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