

## Citizenship and the American Merchant Marine: Seamen's Protection Certificates, 1792–1940

On May 28, 1796, Congress passed an act (1 Stat. 477) to protect American merchant seamen from impressment. Among other things, the act authorized the issue of seamen's protection certificates by U.S. collectors of customs. The certificates were used to verify the identity and nationality of American seamen traveling abroad by documenting such pertinent information as the seaman's name, age, place of birth, and a detailed physical description. Seamen could voluntarily obtain a protection certificate at any customs house by paying a fee of 25 cents and submitting proof of citizenship, such as a birth certificate, passport, naturalization papers, an old protection certificate acquired at another port, or, most typically, a sworn statement taken and witnessed before a notary public, alderman, or other official. Customs agents were required to issue the protection certificates, maintain registers of certificate applications, keep accompanying proofs of citizenship on file, and forward quarterly lists of registered seamen to the Secretary of State.

Seamen's protection certificates continued to be issued as a convenient means of identification until the late 19th century. Protection certificates were reintroduced during World War I and continued to be issued until 1940, when they were replaced by merchant marine licenses.

## **Microfilmed Records**

\_\_\_M1880, *Proofs of Citizenship Used to Apply for Seamen's Protection Certificates for the Port of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 1792–1861.* 61 rolls. Arranged chronologically by year, then alphabetically by name of the seaman. These rolls show the various types of evidence that was submitted as proof of citizenship for protection certificate applications, including sworn affidavits, naturalization papers, and baptismal certificates, as well as statements verifying lost protection certificates. This publication is available online on Ancestry.com.

\_\_\_M972, Computer-Processed Tabulations of Data From Seamen's Protective Certificate Applications to the Collector of Customs for the Port of Philadelphia, 1812–1815. 1 roll. DP.

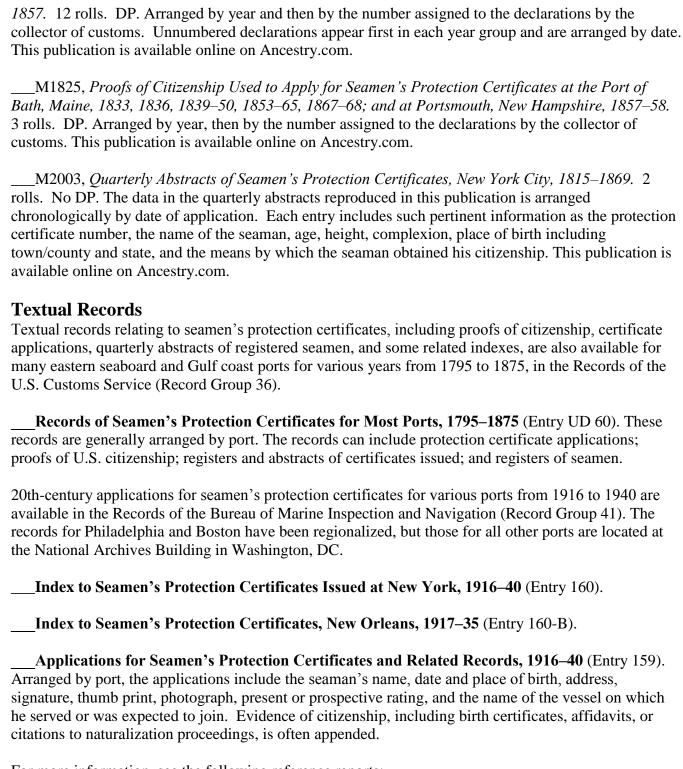
This publication reproduces an analysis of the protection certificate applications for Philadelphia during the War of 1812 years, conducted by Ira Dye. Data from the applications is compiled according to seven series of tabulations: 1) names of all seamen, arranged alphabetically; 2) names of nonwhite seamen, arranged alphabetically; 3) names of seamen under age 18, arranged by age and then alphabetically; 5) place of birth, arranged alphabetically by state or country and then by name of seamen; 6) names of witnesses to the certificate applications, arranged alphabetically; and 7) dates of oaths to the certificate applications, arranged chronologically.

\_\_\_M1826, Proofs of Citizenship Used to Apply for Seamen's Protection Certificates for the Port of New Orleans, Louisiana, 1800, 1802, 1804–07, 1809–12, 1814–16, 1818–19, 1821, 1850–51, 1855–

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For more information, see the following reference reports:

- Citizenship and the American Merchant Marine: Vessel Crew Lists, 1803–1954
- Impressed American Seamen, 1789–1815