



Citizenship and the American Merchant Marine: Vessel Crew Lists, 1803–1954

In an effort to protect American seamen from impressment, Congress passed an act on February 28, 1803 (2 Stat. 203), that required the masters of American vessels leaving U.S. ports for foreign voyages, or likewise arriving at U.S. ports from abroad, to file crew lists with the collector of customs at their port of entry. The law did not apply to foreign vessels or American ships plying coastal trade. The crew lists documented such pertinent information as the seaman's name, place of birth, residence, and physical description. Long after impressment ceased following the War of 1812, vessel crew lists continued to be filed on a routine basis well into the 20th century.

Textual Records

Records of the U.S. Customs Service (RG 36)

19th-century vessel crew lists for ports from New England to the Pacific coast are arranged by geographic region, then alphabetically by customs district. They are located in the NARA regional archives. Sometimes the lists are arranged into two groups: outbound vessels by port of destination, and incoming vessels listed alphabetically by name of vessel. The following entries include some of the major ports for which large volumes of records are available:

At Boston:

- ___ **Bath, ME, 1804–1929, 1934** (Entry 269)
- ___ **Boston, MA, 1874–1918** (Entry 501)
- ___ **New Bedford, MA, 1820–1915** (Entry 585)
- ___ **Newport, RI, 1802–89** (Entry 662)
- ___ **Middletown-Hartford, CT, 1803–73**
(Entry 739)
- ___ **New Haven, CT, 1801–89** (Entry 791)
- ___ **Fairfield-Bridgeport, CT, 1802–1900**
(Entry 822)

At New York:

- ___ **New York, NY, 1803–1919** (Entry 912)

At Philadelphia:

- ___ **Philadelphia, PA, 1793–1899** (Entry 1066)
- ___ **Baltimore, MD, 1839–99** (Entry 1152)

At Atlanta:

- ___ **Charleston, SC, 1833, 1837–99** (Entry 1390)
- ___ **Savannah, GA, 1803–99** (Entry 1469)

At Fort Worth:

- ___ **New Orleans, LA, 1803–1902** (Entry 1638)

At San Bruno:

- ___ **San Francisco, CA, 1867–1911** (Entry 1808)

Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service (RG 85)

20th-century vessel crew lists are also available for many eastern seaboard, Gulf coast, and Pacific coast ports. The entries are arranged alphabetically by port, then by date of arrival. They provide more detailed information, such as name, age, sex, marital status, occupation/position onboard the vessel, literacy status, nationality, race, last residence, and final destination (usually listed as “on ship.”) **Note:** Even though these lists are part of the textual holdings, they exist only on microfilm as reference copies

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(INS originally filmed the lists and then destroyed the originals). The records are located at the National Archives Building in Washington, DC. The following entries include major ports with large volumes of records:

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| ___ Charleston, SC, 1910–45 (Entry 103) | ___ Philadelphia, PA, 1917–45 (Entry 120) |
| ___ Fort, Lauderdale, FL, 1939–45 (Entry 104) | ___ Portland, ME, 1914–44 (Entry 122) |
| ___ Jacksonville, FL, 1906–45 (Entry 109) | ___ Providence, RI, 1918–43 (Entry 123) |
| ___ Key West, FL, 1914–45 (Entry 110) | ___ Savannah, GA, 1910–45 (Entry 124) |
| ___ Miami, FL, 1920–45 (Entry 112) | ___ Tampa, FL, 1904–45 (Entry 125) |
| ___ Mobile, AL, 1903–45 (Entry 113) | ___ West Palm Beach, FL, 1925–45 (Entry 126) |
| ___ Pensacola, FL, 1905–45 (Entry 118) | |

Microfilmed Records

Some of the reference copies for selected 20th-century vessel crew lists have also been reproduced as National Archives microfilm publications. They are available at the National Archives Building in Washington, DC; most are also available online on Ancestry.com. A partial list of publications includes:

- ___ M1399, *Crew Lists of Vessels Arriving at Seattle, Washington, 1903–1917*. 15 rolls.
- ___ M1416, *Crew Lists of Vessels Arriving at San Francisco, 1905–1954*. 174 rolls.
- ___ M2005, *Crew Lists of Vessels Arriving at Ashland, Wisconsin, August 1922–October 1954*. 2 rolls. DP.
- ___ T938, *Crew Lists of Vessels Arriving at Boston, Massachusetts, 1917–1943*. 269 rolls.
- ___ T939, *Crew Lists of Vessels Arriving at New Orleans, Louisiana, 1910–1945*. 311 rolls.
- ___ T941, *Crew Lists of Vessels Arriving at Gloucester, Massachusetts, 1918–1943*. 13 rolls.
- ___ T942, *Crew Lists of Vessels Arriving at New Bedford, Massachusetts, 1917–1943*. 2 rolls.

Note: Crew lists of cargo and passenger vessels are also included in the microfilmed immigration (passenger arrival) records for selected ports, including Detroit, New York, San Francisco, and Seattle. Check NARA's online microfilm catalog at <http://www.archives.gov/research/> for publication titles relating to specific ports.

For more information, see the following reference reports:

- *Citizenship and the American Merchant Marine: Seamen's Protection Certificates, 1792–1869*
- *Impressed American Seamen, 1789–1815*