

Twentieth-century vessel crew lists

If your family's history includes traditions of a relative who was a sailor on an oceanic or Great Lakes vessel, there might be records to help you document some of his career. Perhaps there is a family story of an ancestor who came to America as a sailor, who deserted his ship. This article will focus on the crew lists submitted to U.S. immigration officials.

As world war raged...

While World War I raged in Europe, the U.S. Congress debated immigration policy and other issues. On 5 February 1917, Congress overrode President Wilson's veto to enact the Immigration Act of 1917 (39 Stat. 874), which made many changes to U.S. immigration law.¹ The act went into effect on 1 May 1917, less than one month after the U.S. declared war on Germany.

This legislation significantly changed how vessel crew members were dealt with by immigration authorities. For decades, even centuries, before this act was passed, the assumption was that alien crewmen would return to their home port on the ship on which they arrived, or, at worst, they would quickly ship out on another vessel. If a man's occupation was seaman, he would return to sea, right? Maybe not. He might decide to stay—and—without scrutiny from immigration officials, it might be the easiest way to get in to the United States.

Legal provisions

The 1917 act defined "seaman" as "every person signed on the ship's articles and employed in any capacity on board any vessel arriving in the United States from any foreign port or place."

Masters of vessels arriving at U.S. ports were required to submit a crew list that included each alien crewman's name, position in ship's crew, when and where he was engaged (hired), whether he was to be paid off at the port of arrival, and any other information required by pertinent regulations. A 1924 act specified that the master was required to detain every alien seaman onboard the vessel until completion of his inspection by the immigration officer and medical examiner, or pay a \$1,000 penalty for each alien seaman not detained.

The master was also required to report to immigration officials, "as soon as discovered," the name of every alien who illegally landed from the vessel, along with the alien's descrip-

tion and any other "information likely to lead to his apprehension." In other words, immigration officials were serious about catching deserters! Before departure, the master was required to provide lists of aliens (1) now employed on the vessel who were not employed at the time of arrival, (2) who were paid off or discharged, and (3) who deserted or landed. Failure to provide these lists resulted in the master's liability for a \$10 penalty for each alien for whom information was not given.

The act also prohibited masters from knowingly bringing any alien seaman to the United States with the intent to allow him to land in violation of laws, conventions, or treaties, or be fined \$5,000 per violation. Prohibited crewmen would not be allowed to off ship except temporarily for medical treatment



A real photo post card of the harbor in Oakville, Ontario where the Canada Steamship Lines steamship Coalhaven was unloading coal. Image from Maritime Images of the Great Lakes at <<http://www.hhpl.on.ca/greatlakes/glimages/Details.asp?ID=361>>.

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE
IMMIGRATION AND NATURALIZATION SERVICE

Form No. 1-481 (Rev. 1-22-44)

LIST OR MANIFEST OF ALL PERSONS EMPLOYED ON A GREAT LAKES VESSEL
(Include names of American citizen seamen as well as aliens in order to facilitate inspection of aliens)

Name of vessel *S. Coalhaven*
Port and date of arrival in U.S. *Alton, Ill., 10/11/20*
Owners *Canadian S.S. Co.*

Foreign port of embarkation *Port Willy, Ont.*
Lines *Canadian S.S. Co.*
Local agents *P. J. Quinn, Cleveland, O.*

NO.	NAME IN FULL		NATIONALITY	RACE	SEX	AGE	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	HAIR	EYES	COMPLEXION	SCARS OR MARKS	EDUCATION	RELIGION	MARRIAGE	STATUS	REMARKS	
	FAMILY NAME	Given Name																
1	GDW	EDALE	CAN	WHITE	M	20	5-10	140	BROWN	BROWN	FAIR						175266	3-29-26
2	PORTER	LESLIE	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	208352	3-21-26
3	HOPKINS	FREDERICK	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	166880	4-11-26
4	MORTLOCK	JAMES	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	178891	4-7-26
5	EDWARDS	EDWARD	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	171198	4-11-26

Canadian Steamship Lines steamship Coalhaven crew list on a Form I-481. NARA Microfilm Publication A3420, Crew Lists of Vessels Arriving at Sodus Point, New York, 1945–1957, roll 4.

or pursuant to regulations. Failure to “detain or deport” an excludable alien onboard ship after receiving notice in writing from immigration officials would result in a penalty up to \$1,000. Section 20(b) of the 1924 act specified that the master’s “failure to detain or deport” the alien seaman could be proven by the absence of his name on the vessel’s outgoing crew list or by the master’s report of the alien’s desertion.

Masters were not permitted to pay off or discharge alien seamen unless the seamen were “duly admitted pursuant to the laws and treaties of the United States.” However, an alien seaman who intended to reship on board any other foreign bound vessel was permitted to land temporarily for that purpose after giving notice to immigration officials.

Masters of “any vessel carrying passengers” between foreign and U.S. ports were prohibited from employing alien seamen “afflicted with idiocy, imbecility, insanity, epilepsy, tuberculosis in any form, or a loathsome or dangerous contagious disease,” or to be fined \$50 for each afflicted seaman. Immigration officials could order

the afflicted alien seaman removed to a hospital for treatment, and his master would be liable for the expenses incurred. The act of 26 December 1920, “An act to provide for the treat-

ment in hospital of diseased alien seamen” (41 Stat. 1082), extended the applicability of these provisions to alien seamen arriving on any vessel at U.S. ports, and clarified that, if it was not possible “within a reasonable time to effect a cure,” the afflicted alien seaman would be returned home on the vessel on which he arrived or by other means at the expense of his master.

Any seaman who landed and remained in the United States contrary to the provisions of the act was deemed to be in the United States unlawfully and—at any time within three years after his arrival—could be taken into custody and held for a Board of Special Inquiry to examine his qualifications for admission. If found not qualified for admission to the U.S., he would be deported. The three-year statute of limitations set forth in §34 of the 1917 act applied to seamen who entered from 1 May 1917, through 30 June 1924. The U.S. Supreme Court held that §14 of the 1924 act abolished the three-year statute of limitations for seamen entering the United States after 30 June 1924, by specifying that “any alien” who remained in the United States “for a longer time

than permitted” under the 1924 act or related regulations “shall be taken into custody and deported.”²²

Vessel crew lists

The use of standard forms helps repetitive bureaucratic tasks get done more efficiently, and so it is no surprise that U.S. immigration officials used or required a number of standard forms. Since immigration officials were only concerned with vessels that had departed from a foreign port, vessels traveling only between U.S. ports (coastal trade) did not have to submit these lists.

Crew lists for 1917 to 1944 were normally recorded on Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) Form 680, *List or Manifest of Aliens Employed on the Vessel as Members of Crew*. This form usually notes the name of the vessel and shipmaster, ports and dates of departure and arrival, and the following information about each crew member: full name, position in ship’s company, whether able to read, age, gender, race, nationality, height, weight, and physical marks or peculiarities. The “race” column indicates the crew member’s ethnic background (such as Irish, German, Polish, etc.). It also indicates the date and place at which he was engaged for employment and whether he was to be paid off or discharged at the port of arrival.

Crew lists for 1944 to 1956 were normally recorded on INS Form I-480, *List or Manifest of Aliens Employed on the Vessel as Members of Crew*, which was similar in content to the Form 680.

INS Form 689 (or its successor, Form I-489), *Statement of Changes in Crew*, sometimes accompanies Form 680 (or Form I-480). This form reports the names and other information of any crewmen who (1) deserted, (2) were discharged, (3) were left in a hospital at the port of arrival, or (4) signed on at the port of arrival.

For 1957 and later years, crew lists were normally recorded on INS Form I-418, *Passenger List/Crew List (cross out one)*. This form includes the name of the ship, the ports and dates of arrival and departure, and the following information about each person, if applicable: name, citizenship (“nationality”), passport number, crew position, and where the crewman was shipped or engaged. Other remarks or information may also be annotated on the form. A second I-418 was often submitted to immigration officials upon the vessel’s departure to report alien crewmen hired after arrival or “no change” in crew. These departure manifests are normally interfiled with arrival manifests.

INS Form 559 (or its successor, Form I-259), *Notice to Deliver, Detain on Board, or Remove Alien*, accompanies some crew lists. This form directed the master, who signed the form, to do one of the actions specified in its title regarding a specific alien or aliens, as required by the INS inspector.

Great Lakes vessel crew lists

Crew lists began to be collected at U.S. Great Lakes ports in the 1920s. Remember that only those vessels that had departed from a Canadian or other foreign port were required to submit a crew list, so the vast bulk of Great Lakes traffic—vessel runs between U.S. ports—is not documented in immigration records. Therefore, research on Canadian seamen will often be more productive than research on U.S. crewmen.

Crew lists for the 1920s to 1945 were typically recorded on the Form 680 described above. Crew lists for 1946 to 1956 were normally recorded on INS Form I-481, *List or Manifest of all Persons Employed on a Great Lakes Vessel*. This form includes the names of

the vessel, shipmaster, ship owner, and local agent, ports of arrival and departure, dates of arrival and departure, and the following information about each crew member: full name, citizenship, position in crew, whether to be discharged at the port of arrival, whether medically examined during the current season or year,

and sometimes other information. For 1957 and later years, crew lists were recorded on the Form I-418 described above.

Although every vessel arriving from a foreign port was required to submit a crew list upon arrival, there was a special exception for “designated international ferries.” Ferries were required to submit a full crew list on their first trip on or after 1 January of each year, “and thereafter only with reference to new or discharged crewmen.”

Finding and using crew lists

The INS typically filed vessel crew lists by port of arrival, then chronologically by date of arrival. Sometimes crew lists were interfiled with passenger lists, as is the case with NARA Microfilm Publication T715, *Passenger and Crew Lists of Vessels Arriving at New York, New York, 1897–1957* (8,892 rolls), which is also available online at <<http://ellisland.org/>> with an additional search engine at <<http://stevemorse.org/>>.

What information will you find? Let’s take a look at the crew list for the Italian vessel, *Colombo*, which departed from Genoa, Italy, on 27 March 1925, and subsequently made stops at Naples and Palermo, before reaching New York City on 9 April 1925. (It’s on T715, Roll 3634). The crew list pages are after the passenger list pages. (Page numbers were mechanically stamped in the upper right corner).

Form 689, *Statement of Master of Vessel Regarding Changes in Crew Prior to Departure* (page 115), indicates there had been 296 crew members upon arrival, but

Typical INS Form 559, *Notice to Deliver, Detain on Board, or Remove Alien*. NARA Microfilm Publication T715, *Passenger and Crew Lists of Vessels Arriving at New York, New York, 1897–1957*, roll 3634, volume 8306, page 117.

Navigazione Generale Italiana
 SOCIETÀ PER AZIONE, FLORENZA, RAVENNA E ALTRI LUOGHI
 AGENZIA GEN. SEDI IN GENOVA - CAPITALE SOCIALE L. 200.000.000 VERBALE L. 234.000.000

Piroscalo "COLOMBO" Desertori 116

ELenco DEI PERSONALI DISERTATO NEL PORTO DI NEW YORK DURANTE LA PERMANENZA DEL 9 APRILE AL 13 APRILE 1925

Marinato	BARONE	Munzio	Messina	37315	Genova	17/3/25
	TEPA	Corso	Pizzo	5864		17/3/25
	SEVILACCHIA	Nicola	Ancona	14653		17/3/25
Prop. I.a	CALAZZI	Francesco	Messico Cal	8488		17/3/25
Mozzo	MOZZI	Giovanni	Genova	72100		17/3/25
	RANNO	Giovanni	Messina	42078		17/3/25
Panohista	LOPARDI	Domenico	Reggio Cal	7140		17/3/25
	GERELLI	Carlo	Torre Greca	4400		17/3/25
	PERONE	Giuseppe		6076		17/3/25
	URZINO	Francesco	Reggio Cal	5166		17/3/25
Carbonaro	COZZOLINO	Otello	Torre Greca	13314		17/3/25
	FOROIA	Antonio	Sapota	5945		17/3/25
Operaiere	PURGIRO	Salvatore	Sapoli	51367		25/3/25
	GOTTINO	Antonio	Genova	54273		20/3/25
	STANCHI	Miligi	Genova	48953		17/3/25
	SCAMA	Agostino	Cast. Stea	41100		24/3/25
Carz. I.a	REZZANI	Agostino	Genova	71116		25/3/25
Carz. 2.a	VERGATO	Giuseppe	Genova	60245		26/3/25
	PISSO	Antonio	S. Giulio	37250		25/3/25
	MASSA	Salvatore	Cast. Stea	42174		25/3/25
	GAGLIARDI	Carlo	Genova	54090		17/3/25
Plac. Cuo	GULLA	Carlo	Genova	72151		20/3/25
Plac. Cuo	OSEROLI	Antonio	Genova	55721		20/3/25
Plac. Cuo	LEONE	Antonio	Cast. Stea	3747		17/3/25
Plac. Cuo	MARINO	Antonio	Cast. Stea	38455		25/3/25
	MARINO	Antonio	Cast. Stea	38455		25/3/25

List of deserting crew members from the Colombo supplied to U.S. immigration officials. NARA Microfilm Publication T715, Passenger and Crew Lists of Vessels Arriving at New York, New York, 1897–1957, roll 3634.

thirty-one had deserted (wow!), nineteen were discharged, and four were hired. The list of deserters is given on page 116.

Now let's take a look at one crewman—Girolamo Lupi on page 126. He was employed as a “saloon boy” engaged (hired) at Genoa on 17 March 1925. He was a 17-year-old Italian who was 5 feet 5 inches tall and weighed 161 pounds. There is a “hold on board” notation above his information that indicates that immigration officials required the shipmaster to hold Lupi on board while the vessel was in New York. The reason is not stated but perhaps the immigration inspector considered Lupi (as well as several others) at risk to desert and disappear into New York without being granted legal entry into the U.S. A copy of the Form 559, *Notice to...Detain on Board...*, for Lupi and two other boys is included as page 117.

Researchers looking for vessel crewmen who were discharged or who deserted at New York City will have extra help from National Archives Microfilm Publication A3417, *Index to Alien Crewmen Who Were Discharged or Who Deserted at New York, New York, May 1917–November 1957* (seven rolls), which helps locate the crew lists for these 600,000 (or more) men in T715.

Now let's consider a typical Great Lakes vessel crew list from National Archives Microfilm Publication A3420, *Crew Lists of Vessels Arriving at Sodus Point, New York, 1945–1957*, roll 4. The *Coalhaven*, owned by Canada Steamship Lines, Ltd., departed from Port Welles, Ontario, and arrived at Sodus Point, New York, on 11 October 1947, with a crew of twenty-nine. One of them was Cecil Baines, the second engineer, a Canadian citizen who had been hired at Port Huron, Michigan, on 1 September 1946. To help smooth his entry into the U.S. at ports of call, he had been issued a nonresident alien border crossing identification card (#11908) by the Immigration and Naturalization Service, probably at some earlier U.S. arrival. Baines's name is likely to be found on other crew lists for the *Coalhaven* or other vessels on which he may have worked.

For further research

To learn what additional crew lists are currently available from the National Archives, go to <https://eservices.archives.gov/orderonline/>, click on “Microfilm,” then enter “crew” as your search term, hit “Search.”

For the Great Lakes region, visit “Great Lakes Crew Lists” at <http://www.archives.gov/genealogy/maritime/great-lakes-crew-lists.html>.

Immigration to the United States, 1789–1930,” <http://ocp.hul.harvard.edu/immigration/> from Harvard University Library's Open Collections Program, includes a variety of interesting materials on immigration. 🌳

Notes

1. The Immigration Act of 1917 was amended by an act of December 26, 1920 (41 Stat. 1082), and by the Immigration Act of 1924 (43 Stat. 153). The article is based on the text of the 1917 act, unless otherwise indicated.

2. Section 31 of the 1924 act set the effective date of §14 and certain other sections to be July 1, 1924, while the effective date for the remainder of the act was May 26, 1924. The applicability of the three-year statute of limitations to alien seamen in specific cases was litigated before the U.S. Supreme Court in *Philipides v. Day*, 283 U.S. 48 (1931), and *United States ex rel. Stapf v. Corsi*, 287 U.S. 129 (1932).

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