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Notes and Documents

American Seamen Certificates of Citizenship: 1815

Contributed by Christopher A. Nordmann, Ph.D., CGRS*

American genealogists are avid users of immigrant *passenger* lists, both the ship rolls and the quarterly customs abstracts, from which researchers can identify places of origin, ages, and—sometimes—occupations and names of relatives. Far less used are the records of U.S. seamen, the men working the ocean-going vessels that flew the American stars and bars. Even when an ancestor is known to be a crewman, researchers often fail to find the personal record they seek, either because the relevant material has not been indexed or because the search is restricted by parameters that are irrelevant to this type of resource. A quest for arriving passengers commonly focuses on the port named by family tradition or suggested by the geographic region in which the immigrant family settled. However, seamen saw many ports—a fact that infinitely multiplies the possibilities of finding germane records.

To stem the seafarer's age-old "occupational hazard"—the risk of being kidnapped and forced into the naval service of other countries—the new United States began almost immediately to pass protective legislation. By an act of 1796,¹ Congress decreed that each district collector of customs should issue protection certificates to any seaman presenting evidence of citizenship (e.g., a passport, an earlier protection certificate, or an oath sworn before a public official). An 1803 act instructed all masters of American vessels arriving from or departing on a foreign voyage to file a list of crewmen with that port's collector of customs.² Yet another act (1840) required that owners of the seagoing vessels should file, with this same

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1. *Laws of the United States of America from the 4th of March 1789 to the 4th of March 1815*, 5 vols. (Washington: R. C. Weightman, 1815–16), 1: 477—being first five volumes of the series *U.S. Statutes at Large*, hereinafter cited in the manner 1 Stat. 477.

2. 2 Stat. 203.

official at the port of engagement or discharge, copies of the shipping articles (contracts) that the officers of their vessels executed with each seaman.³ The surviving records are housed today in Record Group 36 (Records of the U.S. Customs Service) at the National Archives.⁴

The protection certificates, which have been previously introduced in this journal,⁵ are extant for random ports, for random years, and in various forms. Discussing files created in the nineteenth century, the National Archives's 1982 guide to the use of its material for genealogical research specifically cites nineteenth-century registers from Fall River, Massachusetts; New Haven and New London, Connecticut; and Newport, Rhode Island. It mentions original applications for Philadelphia, New Haven, and Mobile, Alabama; as well as supporting documents from New York City and Salem and Beverly, Massachusetts.⁶ Beyond this, quarterly abstracts from the registers can be found for numerous other ports—as illustrated by the present list created at New Orleans.

This document also illustrates another point of extreme significance to genealogical and biographical researchers: seamen's records are one resource whose site of creation can be totally independent from the known place of a given individual's residence. The present document was created at New Orleans. Yet only one man of the one hundred sixty covered by the present document had origins in the Crescent City. Only five were from the state of Louisiana; and only one other originated in any state in the Gulf region. Overwhelmingly, these New Orleans-based seamen certificates were for men born in the Northeastern United States, as the following table shows.⁷

NEW ENGLAND		MIDDLE ATLANTIC		UPPER SOUTH		LOWER SOUTH	
Connecticut	5	Delaware	4	D.C.	1	Georgia	1
Maine	1	Maryland	19	North Carolina	4	Louisiana	5
Massachusetts	39	New Jersey	4	Virginia	8	South Carolina	4
Rhode Island	4	New York	28			Tennessee	1
		Pennsylvania	17				

3. 5 Stat. 394.

4. For useful discussions of the available records, see also *Guide to Genealogical Research in the National Archives* (Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Service, 1982), chap. 13. For overviews of other National Archives records relating to American seamen, see Ira Dye, "Seafarers of 1812—A Profile," *Prologue: Journal of the National Archives* 5 (Spring 1973): 3–13; Dye, "Early American Merchant Seafarers," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 120 (October 1976): 331–60; Dye, "The Philadelphia Seamen's Protection Certificate Applications," *Prologue* 18 (Spring 1986): 46–54; John VanDereedt, "Maritime Records in the National Archives," *NGS Quarterly* 76 (March 1988): 52–66; and Craig Roberts Scott, "Naval Records Research in the National Archives," *NGS Quarterly* 79 (September 1991): 207–17.

5. Ruth Dixon, "Seamen's Protection Certificate Records for Genealogical Research," *NGS Quarterly* 78 (September 1990): 204–12.

6. *Guide to Genealogical Research in the National Archives*, 189–94.

7. Also: naturalized citizens: 14; unknown U.S. birth: 1.

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8. See
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experience in
(Washington)

On this Twentyeth Day of August in the Year of our Lord One Thousand Eight Hundred and Five Before me Clement Biddle, Esquire, Notary Public, dwelling in the City of Philadelphia, Personally came John A. Snyder and made Oath that he is a Native of the County of Philadelphia

and a Citizen of the United States, that he is aged 25 Years, 9 Months, of the Height of five Feet, two Inches black Hair dark Eyes, dark Complexion 5 1/2 in India Ink on his left arm two spots with the same between his thumb and fore finger of the left hand —
John A. Snyder

Catharine Snyder being also duly sworn made Oath that she is well acquainted with her son John A. Snyder and verily believes he was born in Philadelphia County, State of Pennsylvania

The original seamen's protection certificates are no longer extant for most ports. The above example is taken from the Philadelphia collection. Smaller files of original certificates also exist for New Haven, Connecticut, and Mobile, Alabama.

Even a cursory scanning of a register such as this makes clear one other point of genealogical import. Employment on the high seas was perhaps the closest equivalent to "equal employment opportunities" that existed in nineteenth-century America. The following list includes five males labeled *black* and *mulatto*, whose Negro heritage is further suggested by (or perhaps its determining factor was then) the description of hair texture rather than color. The numerous others whose skin is labeled *dark* or *brown* or *yellow* may well be partly of African American or Native American descent as well. Population statistics of this era reveal that roughly 3 percent of the American population was free and nonwhite⁸—the same representation found within the seagoing labor force covered by this list.

The document herein transcribed is labeled "Abstract of Certificates of Citizenship issued to American Seamen for the second quarter of the year 1815." It is one of a number of such lists boxed as "Abstracts of American Seamen for the District of Mississippi," in RG 36 of the National Archives.

8. Statistics from the U.S. census of 1810 are used for this calculation, as reported in *Historical Statistics of the United States, 1789 to 1945* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1949), 25. For the black-seaman experience, also see Debra L. Newman, *Black History: A Guide to Civilian Records in the National Archives* (Washington: National Archives Trust Fund Board, 1984).

DATE	NAME	NATIVITY	AGE	HEIGHT	COMPLEXION	HAIR	EYES
3 April	Joseph Robinson	Massachusetts	25	5' 7¼"	Fair	Brown	Grey
	William Clark	D ^o [Ditto]	25	5' 3¼"	Brown	Black	Blue
	Thomas Thompson	Maryland	26	5' 6½"	Fair	Brown	Blue
6 April	Hollis Sawtell [Lawtell?]	Massachusetts	24	5' 8"	Fair	Brown	Hazle
	James Robinson	Connecticut	30	5' 5½"	Dark	Dark	Blue
	James Nowlan	New York	22	5' 2"	Dark	Brown	Grey
10 April	Archibald McClesh	Virginia	25	5' 5½"	Fair	Light	Hazle
	James Williams	South Carolina	25	5' 6"	Brown	Black	Hazle
11 April	Andrew Bartholo	Naturalized	33	5' 7"	Fair	Dark	Dark
13 April	David Johnson	Citizen of the U.S.	32	5' 5"	Dark	Dark	Grey
14 April	James S. Meredith	Philadelphia	17	5' 6½"	Fair	Light	Blue
15 April	Thomas Eley	Maryland	18	5' 9"	Fair	Light	Blue
	Pierre Ferrand	Naturalized	45	5' 2¾"	Dark	Black	Hazle
17 April	William Jones	Norfolk Virg ^a	24	4' 9½"	Fair	Light	Blue
18 April	John Camron	New York	20	5' 8"	Fair	Dark	Blue
19 April	Edw ^d G. Hearsey	Louisiana	15	5' 5½"	Fair	Light	Blue
	William Knab	Baltimore	25	5' 10"	Fair	Light	Grey
	John Renaud	Naturalized	36	5' 7¼"	Fair	Chestnut	Brown
20 April	James P. [L?] Boss	Rhode Island	26	5' 7¾"	Brown	Black	Dark
21 April	William Murphy	Philadelphia	20	5' 9¾"	Light	Dark	Dark
	Samuel Smith	Massachuset[t]s	26	5' 4½"	Fair	Brown	Hazle
	Tho ^s G. Easterbrooks	D ^o	21	5' 9½"	Light	Brown	Blue
	Charles Henry	Maryland	35	5' 8"	Black	Wooley	Black
25 April	Joseph Fernandez	Naturalized	28	5' 4"	Dark	Black	Black
	Lewis Jo ^s Polon	D ^o	25	5' 5"	Sallow	Brown	Hazle
	Anthony Serneng	D ^o	52	5' 5½"	Sallow	Grey	Brown
	Sam ^l . W. Rowan	Tennessee	26	5' 6½"	Fair	Brown	Brown

DATE	NAME	NATIVITY	AGE	HEIGHT	COMPLEXION	HAIR	EYES
25 April	George Watson	Virginia	17	5' 10"	Fair	Black	Blue

Lewis J. Polan
 Anthony Seaming
 Saml. W. Rowan

Dark
 Sallow
 Sallow
 Fair

Black
 Brown
 Grey
 Brown

Black
 Hazel
 Brown
 Brown

DATE	NAME	NATIVITY	AGE	HEIGHT	COMPLEXION	HAIR	EYES
25 April	George Watson	Virginia	37	5' 7"	Brown	Black	Dark
	Clement Messick	Delaware	22	5' 7"	Fair	Light	Grey
27 April	John Shaddle	New York	22	5' 7 1/4"	Fair	Brown	Grey
	William Morton	Massachusetts	21	5' 7"	Fair	Dark	Hazel
	Martin Cortelyn	New York	19	5' 6"	Brown	Light	Blue
	Henry Parker	North Carolina	23	5' 10"	Fair	Brown	Hazel
	Joseph Ellison	New York	18	5' 7"	Fair	Light	Hazel
	Jonathan Jewitt	Massachusetts	26	5' 6"	Fair	Light	Blue
	[torn—]	Connecticut	27	6' [?]	Brown	Light	Grey
	[torn—]		24	5' 6"	Brown	Black	Grey
	[torn—]						
	[torn—]						
28 April	George Smith	Maryland	23	5' 11"	Fair	Light	Blue
29 April	Ebenezer Thompson	Massachusetts	46	5' 8 3/4"	Fair	Brown	Blue
	Ralph Foster	Pennsylvania	23	6' 2"	Fair	Brown	Blue
1 May	James Armstrong	New York	28	5' 4"	Fair	Brown	Blue
	John Murdock	Philadelphia	28	5' 10 1/2"	Fair	Brown	Grey
	John Rodolph	Philadelphia	22	5' 6 1/2"	Fair	Brown	Blue
	Judson Josselyn	Massachusetts	25	5' 7 1/2"	Fair	Black	Dark
	John Turner	D ^o	23	5' 7"	Fair	Brown	Dark
	John McCland [?]	New York	23	5' 7"	Fair	Light	Blue
	Thomas Dunningham	Massachusetts	42	5' 5 3/4"	Fair	Light	Grey
	Bertrand Phillips	Naturalized	32	5' 4 1/4"	Dark	Black	Black
	William Sutton [?]	Virginia	28	5' 11"	Fair	Light	Blue
	Joseph Patterson	Louisiana	12	4' 7"	Yellow	Light	Hazel
3 May	William Passarow	Massachusetts, Boston	18	5' 4 1/2"	Fair	Light	Blue
	Sylvain Fournier [?]	New Orleans	16	5'	Mulatto	Wooley	Dark
	Laurence Farrell	Massachusetts	25	5' 7 1/2"	Fair	Light	Blue

DATE	NAME	NATIVITY	AGE	HEIGHT	COMPLEXION	HAIR	EYES
4 May	Jeremiah Courtney	New York	22	5' 7 $\frac{3}{4}$ "	Fair	Brown	Dark
4 May	Joseph Perry	Louisiana	32	5' 9 $\frac{1}{4}$ "	Brown	Black	Dark
5 May	Michael Liddle	Baltimore, Mar ^d	18	5' 6 $\frac{1}{2}$ "	Fair	Brown	Hazle
	John Williams	Maryland	23	5' 7 $\frac{1}{4}$ "	Dark	Brown	Hazle
	George Clark	North Carolina	19	5' 11"	Fair	Brown	Blue
	Samuel Morton	New York	29	5' 6"	Fair	Black	Hazle
6 May	Samuel Bailey	Delaware	20	5' 3 $\frac{1}{2}$ "	Black	Wooley	Dark
8 May	William Penn	Pen[n]sylvania	38	5' 5 $\frac{3}{4}$ "	Fair	Black	Dark
10 May	Peter Lind	New York	28	5' 4"	Fair	Fair	Blue
11 May	John Sundry	Massachusetts	21	5' 3"	Fair	Brown	Grey
12 May	John Crawley	Alexandria	24	5' 9"	Fair	Light	Blue
	Willis Lang [Lany?]	South Carolina	22	5' 7 $\frac{1}{2}$ "	Fair	Brown	Blue
	John Edwards	Philadelphia	31	5' 8 $\frac{3}{4}$ "	Fair	Brown	Blue
15 May	John Atkins	Virginia	25	5' 7 $\frac{1}{2}$ "	Fair	Brown	Light
16 May	John Bonnell [Bennett?]	Massachusetts	24	5' 7 $\frac{1}{4}$ "	Brown	Brown	Brown
17 May	James Ferguson	Philadelphia	24	5' 7 $\frac{1}{2}$ "	Brown	Black	Hazle
18 May	Billie [Bilbe?] Blackwood	New Jersey	30	5' 4 $\frac{1}{2}$ "	Fair	Brown	Blue
	Amos Speed	Massachusetts	20	5' 4 $\frac{1}{2}$ "	Brown	Black	Hazle
19 May	William Estaugh	New Jersey	23	5' 7"	Brown	Brown	Blue
	William Moore	Delaware	31	5' 5"	Fair	Light	Blue
	Thomas Pinlen [?]	Delaware	38	5' 7"	Brown	Grey	Blue
	John Oliver	New Jersey	22	5' 7 $\frac{1}{2}$ "	Dark	Dark	Black
	Geo. H. Campbell	New York	31	5' 6 $\frac{1}{2}$ "	Dark	Black	Grey
	John Dubois	Naturalized	38	5' 4"	Light	Dark Grey	Hazle
	Joseph Whipple	Massachusetts	22	5' 7"	Fair	Light	Blue
	James Morgan	Massachusetts	24	6'	Dark	Black	Black
	James Griffith	Massachusetts	24	6'	Fair	Light	Black
	John Phoenix	New York	32	5' 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ "	Brown	Brown	Grey

DATE	NAME	NATIVITY	AGE	HEIGHT	COMPLEXION	HAIR	EYES
19 May	Joseph Williamson Hale	Virginia	26	6' 0 $\frac{1}{2}$ "	Fair	Light	Grey

Joseph Williamson Hale
 James Morgan
 James Griffith
 John Phoenix

Massachusetts
 Massachusetts
 Massachusetts
 New York

26
 24
 24
 32

6' 0 1/2"
 5' 5"
 5' 9 1/2"
 5' 2 1/2"

Fair
 Dark
 Fair
 Brown

Light
 Black
 Light
 Brown

Blue
 Black
 Black
 Grey

DATE	NAME	NATIVITY	AGE	HEIGHT	COMPLEXION	HAIR	EYES
19 May	Joseph Williamson Hale	Virginia	26	6' 0 1/2"	Fair	Light	Grey
	William Lamb	Massachusetts	24	5' 5"	Fair	Light	Grey
	Francis Forrestall	Louisiana	21	5' 9 1/2"	Sallow	Black	Black
	[torn—]						
22 May	John Thompson	New York	21	5' 3 1/2"	Brown	Brown	Dark
	John Clay	Massachusetts	20	5' 7"	Ruddy	D ^k Brown	Grey
	Samuel Parsons	Portland	23	5' 8"	Fair	Brown	Grey
	Henry Shefer	Maryland	21	5' 4"	Brown	Hazle [sic]	Hazle
23 May	William Saddler	Maryland	32	5' 10 1/2"	Fair	Brown	Hazle
	Robert Morris	North Carolina	24	5' 5"	Brown	Black	Hazle
	William Newman	Maryland	31	5' 5 3/4"	Fair	L ^t Brown	Blue
24 May	Jacob Fox	North Carolina	26	5' 7"	Brown	Brown	Blue
	William Lambert	Massachusetts	15	4' 6 3/4"	Fair	Brown	Blue
	William Dakin	Pen[n]sylvania	31	5' 8"	Brown	Brown	Grey
	Francis Ellis	Massachusetts	20	5' 4 1/2"	Fair	Light	Blue
	Pierre Mazile	Naturalized	44	5' 4"	Dark	Grey	D ^k Grey
	Eugene Ladner	Naturalized	24	6'	Mulatto	Black	Black
25 May	Daniel Ross	Philadelphia	25	5' 6 3/4"	Brown	Brown	Hazle
	William Black	Pen[n]sylvania	35	5' 10"	Black	Wooley	Black
	Anthony Michaels	D ^o	15	4' 10 1/2"	Fair	Sandy	Hazle
26 May	John Drew	Philadelphia	45	5' 10 3/4"	Brown	Brown	Blue
	John Steel	Baltimore	21	5' 6 1/2"	Dark	Brown	Blue
	Ebenezer Underwood	Boston	17	5' 11 1/2"	Fair	Light	L ^t Blue
27 May	William Parker	Philadelphia	28	5' 5"	Brown	Brown	Blue
	Thomas Talmage	New Jersey	33	5' 9 1/4"	Fair	Black	Grey
	Martin Thornton	Georgia	29	5' 9"	Fair	Light	Grey
	Auguste German	Naturalized	20	5' 5 1/2"	Fair	Light	Blue
	Henry V. [?] Goss	New York	21	5' 6 1/2"	Fair	Dark	Grey

DATE	NAME	NATIVITY	AGE	HEIGHT	COMPLEXION	HAIR	EYES
29 May	James Rose	Rhode Island	44	5' 6½"	Brown	Dark	Grey
	Joseph Richards	Charleston	21	5' 7"	Brown	Brown	Brown
	James Kerns	New York	27	5' 10"	Fair	Brown	Grey
	John Smith	Massachusetts	22	5' 6"	Brown	Brown	Grey
30 May	Vincente Tacquechel [r.]	Naturalized	24	5' 5½"	Brown	Black	Black
	Thomas Wilson	New York	24	5' 8"	Brown	Brown	Hazle
	Barnett Adamson	Massachusetts	23	5' 5½"	Fair	Dark	Blue
	Jeremiah Martin	New York	46	5' 2¾"	Fair	Brown	Blue
	Samuel Mirns	Maryland	23	5' 3½"	Fair	Light	Hazle
31 May	William West	Philadelphia	21	5' 7"	Dark	Dark	Black
1 June	Richard Salter	New York	24	5' 8"	Brown	Brown	Blue
2 June	Samuel Russell	New York	25	5' 6"	Fair	Brown	Hazle
3 June	George Jones	Baltimore	20	5' 5½"	Brown	Dark	Grey
6 June	Robert W--- [faded]	Naturalized	37	5' 9"	Fair	Brown	Hazle
7 June	James Brown	Massachusetts	26	5' 8"	Fair	Brown	Grey
	John Anthony	Naturalized	39	5' 4½"	Brown	D ^k Brown	Brown
9 June	Daniel Warner	Rhode Island	31	5' 6"	Fair	Brown	Blue
	Matthew Gardner	Massachusetts	25	5' 2½"	Fair	D ^k Brown	Black
10 June	James Johnston	Massachusetts	21	5' 7"	Brown	Brown	Blue
	Corner Wheeling	Massachusetts	24	5' 3¾"	Brown	Brown	Blue
	Raphael Spalding	Maryland	22	5' 8¾"	Ruddy	Brown	Black
	Christopher Stanton	Connecticut	20	5' 6"	Fair	Red	Grey
	James Scott	Massachusetts	29	6'	Ruddy	Brown	Blue
12 June	Alexander Scott	New York	23	5' 5"	Fair	Light	Blue
	William Smith	New York	20	5' 4"	Fair	Dark	Blue
13 June	Abraham E---ston [Cranston?]	Maryland	[torn—]				
17 June	John Camp	New York	38	5' 6¼"	Dark	Black	Grey
	Jermain W. Altaines	Philadelphia	30	5' 9"	Fair	Brown	Blue

DATE	NAME	NATIVITY	AGE	HEIGHT	COMPLEXION	HAIR	EYES
19 June	Oliver L. J. Carney	Massachusetts	18	5' 6"	Fair	Light	Hazle

DATE	NAME	NATIVITY	AGE	HEIGHT	COMPLEXION	HAIR	EYES
19 June	Oliver L. [?] Gurney	Massachusetts	18	5' 6"	Fair	Light	Hazle
20 June	Jeremiah Lanton	Rhode Island	35	5' 5 1/2"	Fair	Light	Blue
	Charles Cutter	Massachusetts	26	5' 4"	Brown	Black	Grey
	John Smith	New York	21	5' 5 1/2"	Fair	Red	Blue
	Daniel Chapman	Baltimore	42	5' 8"	Brown	Brown	Brown
	Francis Boyles	Baltimore	25	5' 7 1/2"	Fair	Light	Blue
21 June	Aaron R. Savage	Middletown	21	5' 4 1/2"	Brown	Brown	Grey
	Thomas Channings	Massachusetts	21	5' 7"	Brown	Brown	Brown
	James Butler	New York	23	5' 7 1/2"	Dark	Dark	Grey
	William Smith	New York	25	5' 5"	Fair	Black	Hazle
	John Baker	New York	36	5' 7 1/2"	Fair	L' Brown	L' Blue
22 June	William Thompson	Philadelphia	24	5' 11"	Dark	Brown	Hazle
	Andrew Temer [Lerner?]	New York	24	5' 5"	Fair	Brown	Blue
23 June	Hamilton Dryden	Maryland	22	5' 5"	Fair	Light	Blue
24 June	William Martin	New York	18	5'	L' Brown	Light	Grey
27 June	Gerard Dulen	District of Columbia	21	5' 7"	Ruddy	Brown	L' Hazle
28 June	Joseph Lindsay	Massachusetts	36	5' 6 1/4"	Light	Light	Blue
	Robert Gamble	Baltimore	22	5' 9 3/4"	Brown	Light	Grey
	Henry Grinnalds	Virginia	20	5' 9 1/2"	Fair	Brown	Blue
29 June	John Duvant	Massachusetts	28	4' 11"	Dark	Dark	Dark
	Thomas Jones	Connecticut	21	5' 6 1/2"	Ruddy	Dark	Hazle
	James Smith	Massachusetts	29	5' 0 1/2"	Brown	D* Brown	Hazle
	Robert Bell	Massachusetts	17	5' 7 3/4"	Fair	Light	L' blue
30 June	John Baptiste	South Carolina	20	5' 5 1/2"	Brown	L' Brown	L' Grey
	Reuben Howard	Massachusetts	15	4' 10"	Light	Light	Blue

Collector's Office, District of Mississippi, June 30th 1815
 P. L. B. Duplessis [Pierre Le Barbier Duplessis]