



## ***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; 4) names of seamen over age 40, 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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1857. 12 rolls. DP. Arranged by year and then by the number assigned to the declarations by the collector of customs. Unnumbered declarations appear first in each year group and are arranged by date. This publication is available online on Ancestry.com.

\_\_\_M1825, *Proofs of Citizenship Used to Apply for Seamen's Protection Certificates at the Port of Bath, Maine, 1833, 1836, 1839–50, 1853–65, 1867–68; and at Portsmouth, New Hampshire, 1857–58.* 3 rolls. DP. Arranged by year, then by the number assigned to the declarations by the collector of customs. This publication is available online on Ancestry.com.

\_\_\_M2003, *Quarterly Abstracts of Seamen's Protection Certificates, New York City, 1815–1869.* 2 rolls. No DP. The data in the quarterly abstracts reproduced in this publication is arranged chronologically by date of application. Each entry includes such pertinent information as the protection certificate number, the name of the seaman, age, height, complexion, place of birth including town/county and state, and the means by which the seaman obtained his citizenship. This publication is available online on Ancestry.com.

## **Textual Records**

Textual records relating to seamen's protection certificates, including proofs of citizenship, certificate applications, quarterly abstracts of registered seamen, and some related indexes, are also available for many eastern seaboard and Gulf coast ports for various years from 1795 to 1875, in the Records of the U.S. Customs Service (Record Group 36).

\_\_\_**Records of Seamen's Protection Certificates for Most Ports, 1795–1875** (Entry UD 60). These records are generally arranged by port. The records can include protection certificate applications; proofs of U.S. citizenship; registers and abstracts of certificates issued; and registers of seamen.

20th-century applications for seamen's protection certificates for various ports from 1916 to 1940 are available in the Records of the Bureau of Marine Inspection and Navigation (Record Group 41). The records for Philadelphia and Boston have been regionalized, but those for all other ports are located at the National Archives Building in Washington, DC.

\_\_\_**Index to Seamen's Protection Certificates Issued at New York, 1916–40** (Entry 160).

\_\_\_**Index to Seamen's Protection Certificates, New Orleans, 1917–35** (Entry 160-B).

\_\_\_**Applications for Seamen's Protection Certificates and Related Records, 1916–40** (Entry 159). Arranged by port, the applications include the seaman's name, date and place of birth, address, signature, thumb print, photograph, present or prospective rating, and the name of the vessel on which he served or was expected to join. Evidence of citizenship, including birth certificates, affidavits, or citations to naturalization proceedings, is often appended.

For more information, see the following reference reports:

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