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Researching Maritime History on the Great Lakes and Inland Waterways

The archival records described here are unique, original historical documents. Refer to the *Guide to Records in the National Archives--Great Lakes Region* (Reference Information Paper 96, 1996) in print or online at <http://www.archives.gov/chicago/> for introductory descriptions of these and other record groups. Some records from the National Archives in Washington are reproduced on microfilm and identified with an “M,” “T,” or “A” publication number. Call (773) 948-9001 to arrange your research visit. Other related records also exist in the National Archives and Records Administration repositories in Washington, D.C., and in College Park, Maryland. Refer to *Guide to Federal Records in the National Archives of the United States* online at www.archives.gov or in print.

RG 21, Records of the District Courts of the United States. [50,241 cubic feet] Admiralty law is administered solely by Federal courts, which hold extensive jurisdiction over civil and criminal causes of a maritime nature, controversies arising out of acts done upon or relating to the seas and Great Lakes, questions of prize, and all maritime contracts, torts, injuries, or offenses. The admiralty jurisdiction of United States District Courts extends to the oceans, navigable rivers running into the ocean, and the Great Lakes and their navigable connections. Court cases document vessels and the debts their owners incurred, debts owed to crewmen for unpaid wages, and other controversies about collisions, insurance, cargoes, and maritime law.

Records of admiralty proceedings in U.S. District Courts exist for judicial districts in Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio, and Wisconsin, as well as in Territorial Courts for Michigan Territory, 1815-1837, and for Wisconsin Territory, 1847-1848. Records commonly include case files, docket books, and journals. Certain Federal courts kept separate series of admiralty records, while others documented proceedings in admiralty cases among all other civil action case records. If no separate body of admiralty records exist for a certain federal court, admiralty cases may be filed among civil action case records. Case files of the Territorial Court of Michigan, 1815-1836, are reproduced on nine microfilm rolls as publication M1111.

RG 24, Records of the Bureau of Naval Personnel. [33 microfilm rolls] *Index to Rendezvous Reports, Civil War, 1861-1865* (T1099, 31 rolls), serves as an index to naval personnel records relating to the western inland waterways, including the Mississippi and Ohio Rivers. *Vessel and Organizational Indexes to U.S. Navy Muster Rolls, 1892-1938* (A3442, 2 rolls) includes training ships on the Great Lakes.

RG 26, Records of the U.S. Coast Guard. [608 cubic feet] Records of vessels, U.S. Life Saving Stations, and other facilities in Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio, and Wisconsin, 1840-1983. The records document life-saving operations, shipwrecks, vessel inspections, weather observations at life-saving stations, and the remarks of watch officers. The bulk of the records consists of U.S. Life Saving Service logbooks spanning the years 1876-1941 overall from stations on or near the coasts of Lakes Superior, Michigan, Huron, and Erie. Other records include logs of U.S. Coast Guard cutters, 1966-1983, outgoing correspondence of the 10th (later, 11th) district office, 1897-1917, and logs and crew lists, 1959-1967, of merchant marine vessels on the Great Lakes.

Microfilm copies of related records include a list of *Marine Casualties on the Great Lakes, 1863-1873* (T729, 1 roll); *U.S. Coast Guard Casualty and Wreck Reports, 1913-1939* (T925, 21 rolls), and an *Index* (T926, 7

rolls); *Registers of Lighthouse Keepers, 1845-1912* (M1373, 6 rolls); *Lighthouse Letters, 1792-1809* (M63, 3 rolls); and *Lighthouse Deeds and Contracts, 1790-1853* (M94, 2 rolls.)

RG 27, Records of the U.S. Weather Bureau. [86 microfilm rolls] *Climatological Records of the Weather Bureau, 1819-1893* (T907), from Illinois and Indiana (rolls 112-144), Michigan and Minnesota (rolls 243-274), and Ohio (rolls 397-422). Climatological records from Alpena, Michigan, November 1896-December 1899; St. Vincent, Minnesota, 1 March-18 April 1883; Ludington, Michigan, 1916.

RG 29, Records of the U.S. Census Bureau. [3 microfilm rolls] *1930 Census of Seamen* (Microfilm publication number M1932).

RG 36, Records of the U.S. Customs Service. [146 cubic feet and 16 microfilm rolls] Records of customs districts and collectors of customs in Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio, and Wisconsin, 1853-1973. The records include wreck reports, conveyances of vessel titles, and other records relating to vessels and coasting trade. There also are marine hospital records from hospitals at Duluth, Minnesota, 1871-1885, and Milwaukee, Wisconsin, 1858-1870. Copies of passenger lists from two Great Lakes ports in New York State, Oswegatchie (1821-1823) and Rochester (1866), are reproduced on microfilm publication M575.

RG 41, Records of the Bureau of Marine Inspection and Navigation. [353 cubic feet and 31 microfilm rolls] Records relating to the licensing of certain vessel personnel and to the inspection, enrollment, and documentation of vessels at Great Lakes ports in Illinois, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio, and Wisconsin, 1818-1973, and at customs offices along the Illinois, Mississippi, Missouri, and Ohio Rivers in or bordering Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kentucky, and Wisconsin, 1851-1968. Most are bound volumes, arranged in a chronological or sequential scheme. Some have indexes or registers of the names of vessels (for vessel records) or persons (for personnel records). Some common records relating to vessel personnel are Registers of Licenses Issued to Engineers and Assistant Engineers and various types of Oaths of Ship Masters (captains). Commonly, records relating to the vessels themselves document three processes: vessel construction and inspection; vessel enrollment, registration, and licensing; and vessel mortgages, sales, and conveyances. Numerous small series of other records also exist, such as an Account of Employed Seamen, 1868-1871, and a Record of Hospital Dues, 1877-1885, for a marine hospital at Muskegon, Michigan.

Related RG 41 records are preserved in the National Archives Building in Washington, D.C. Several series of Washington records about Great Lakes ports are reproduced on microfilm. The microfilm publication *Master Abstracts of Certificates of Enrollment Issued for Merchant Vessels at Selected Great Lakes Ports, 1815-1911* (M2107) serves as a tool for searching certificates of enrollment from Detroit, Michilimackinac, and Sault Sainte Marie, Michigan, 1818-1898 (M2101); Cleveland, 1829-1915 (M1862); Chicago, 1847-1911 (M1800); Green Bay, Manitowoc, and Milwaukee, Wisconsin, 1851-1868 (M2100); various New York State ports on Lake Ontario, 1816-1867 (M2105); and various other Great Lakes ports, 1815-1872 (M2099). Master abstracts of certificates of enrollment for the Mississippi River port city of St. Louis, 1846-1870, are also reproduced on microfilm (M2106). *Summaries of Vessel Casualties and Violations of Law, Rules, and Regulations on the Great Lakes, January 1911-June 1937* (M2098) documents steam-powered vessels and crews on the Great Lakes, but not sailing ships. These microfilm publications are available in the National Archives at Chicago's microfilm reading room.

RG 56, General Records of the Department of the Treasury. [308 microfilm rolls] Letters received by the Secretary of the Treasury from Collectors of Customs (G, H, I series), 1833-1869 (226 rolls); Letters sent by the Secretary of the Treasury to Collectors of Customs at all ports, 1789-1847, and at small ports, 1847-1878 (G series) (43 rolls); Correspondence of the Secretary of the Treasury with Collectors of Customs, 1789-1833 (39 rolls).

RG 58, Records of the Internal Revenue Service. [173 cubic feet and 123 microfilm rolls] Monthly, annual, and special tax assessment lists from collection districts in Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, and Ohio (1862-1873) and Wisconsin (1867-1873). Sailing and steam vessels were taxed.

RG 59, Records of the Department of State. [69 microfilm rolls] Letters of application and recommendation for federal employment (including Customs, Life-Saving Service, and Lighthouse Service positions) during President Ulysses S. Grant's administration, 1869-1877 (M968, 69 microfilm rolls).

RG 77, Records of the Office of the Chief of Engineers. [1,561 cubic feet] Records of various midwestern divisions and district offices of the Army Corps of Engineers, 1832-1979, documenting the Corps' maintenance and improvements to inland waterways and Great Lakes harbors, the formulation and execution of plans for flood control, the operation of dams and locks, and the approval of plans for the construction of bridges, wharves, piers, and other works over navigable waterways. Some records document the locations of wrecked vessels and their removal as obstructions to navigation. Also included are records of the U.S. Lake Survey, 1845-1913.

RG 85, Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service. [91 microfilm rolls] Crew lists of vessels arriving at Great Lakes ports:

Michigan

- Algonac, Marine City, Marysville, and Roberts Landing, Michigan, May 1937-January 1957 (A3418, 3 rolls)
- Alpena, Bay City, Mackinac Island, Rogers City, Saginaw, and Saint Clair, Michigan, June 1945-June 1966 (A3430, 6 rolls)
- DeTour, Michigan, 1946-1956 (A3421, 1 roll)
- Detroit, Michigan, 1946-1957 (M1479, 23 rolls)
- Escanaba, Michigan, May 1946-November 1956 (A3413, 1 roll)
- Grand Haven, Manistee, Muskegon, and South Haven, Michigan, May 1948-December 1956 (A3433, 1 roll)
- Hancock, Isle Royale, Marquette, Menominee, and Sault Sainte Marie, Michigan, January 1946-January 1957 (A3432, 4 rolls)
- Port Huron, October 1929-January 1957 (A3443, 2 rolls)

Minnesota

- Baudette, Grand Marais, International Falls, Ranier, and Warroad, Minnesota, 1946-1956 (A3444, 1 roll).
- Two Harbors, Minnesota, August 1929-October 1956. (A3384, 1 roll).

New York

- Ogdensburg, New York: Arrivals (1948-1972) and Departures (1960-1968) (A3409, 2 rolls)
- Rouses Point and Waddington, New York, 1954-1956 (A3449, 1 roll)
- Sodus Point, New York, 1945-1957 (A3420, 15 rolls)

Ohio

- Ashtabula and Conneaut, Ohio, 1952-1974 (A3405, 10 rolls)

- Fairport (1952-1957), Huron (1955-1956), Lorain (1952-1965), Marblehead (1955), and Sandusky (1955-1958) (A3415, 6 rolls)

Wisconsin

- Ashland, Wisconsin, August 1922-October 1954 (M2005, 2 rolls)
- Ashland, Kenosha, Marinette, Sheboygan, Sturgeon Bay, and Washburn, Wisconsin, 1926-1956 (M2044, 1 roll)
- Green Bay, Wisconsin, October 1925-November 1969 (A3397, 5 rolls)
- Manitowoc, Wisconsin, 1925-1956 (M2045, 1 roll)
- Milwaukee, Wisconsin, August 1922-December 1956 (A3399, 8 rolls)

RG 90, Records of the U.S. Public Health Service. [12 cubic feet] Records of the Cleveland Marine Hospital at the Port of Cleveland, Ohio, 1870-1928, documenting health care of individual sailors and crew members of Great Lakes ships. Some individual patients' clinical records are arranged in a rough alphabetical scheme by the first letter of the patient's surname. The records contain detailed information about diseases and injuries suffered by Great Lakes sailors and crew members, including female cooks. See RG 36 for records from other marine hospitals at Duluth, Minnesota, and Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and RG 41 for records from the marine hospital at Muskegon, Michigan.

RG 181, Records of Naval Districts and Shore Establishments. [1,358 cubic feet] Correspondence files, log books, and other records of the Mound City Naval Station, 1873; the Office of the Commandant of the Ninth Naval District, 1913-1953; Great Lakes Naval Training Station, 1914-1947; Glenview Naval Air Station and Naval Air Reserve Training Command, 1942-1957; and other bases. Some files include photographs and maps.

RG 217, Records of the Accounting Officers of the Department of the Treasury. [1 roll] Letters sent by the Commissioner of Customs relating to smuggling, 1865-1869 (M497, 1 roll).

RG 267, Records of the Supreme Court of the United States. [184 microfilm rolls] Microfilm copies of case dockets, 1791-1950 (M216, 27 rolls); minutes, 1790-1950 (M215, 41 rolls); appellate case files, 1792-1831 (M214, 96 rolls); and an index to case files, 1792-1909 (M408, 20 rolls).

RG 270, Records of the War Assets Administration. [721 cubic feet] Files about real estate parcels and structures owned or built by the United States Government in six states bordering the Great Lakes and inland rivers. Shipyards, harbor and waterway structures, Coast Guard, and naval facilities are documented in the files, which sometimes include photographs, plat maps, and brochures promoting sale or lease of the property.

RG 276, Records of the United States Courts of Appeals. [6,338 cubic feet and 1 microfilm roll] Case records, briefs, and dockets, with indexes, of the U.S. [Circuit] Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit, 1891-1978. The Sixth Circuit heard appeals from U.S. District Courts in Tennessee, Kentucky, Ohio, and Michigan, including admiralty appeals relating to the Ohio River, Lake Erie, Lake Huron, and Lake Superior near Michigan's Upper Peninsula. Case records, briefs, and dockets of the U.S. [Circuit] Court of Appeals for the Seventh Circuit, 1891-1977. Microfilm copy of a general index to cases before the U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals for the Seventh Circuit, 1891-1936 (M1991, 1 roll). The Seventh Circuit received appeals from U.S. District Court decisions in cases originating in Illinois, Indiana, and Wisconsin, including appeals of admiralty cases involving the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers, other inland rivers, and Lake Michigan.

RG 291, Record of the Federal Property Resources Service. [446 cubic feet] Records of the Chicago Regional Office documenting the sale or lease of U.S. Government properties, including lighthouses, life-saving stations, naval installations, and related sites. Some files include photographs and site maps.

RG 370, Records of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. [0.25 linear inch] Eight issues of a humorous weekly newsletter, "The Peary Log," produced weekly by the crew of the U.S.S. *Peary* while they participated in a survey team on Lake Michigan between August 6 and October 23, 1946.

No Record Group Number. [130 microfilm rolls] *A Microfilm Supplement to The Territorial Papers of the United States: Wisconsin, 1836-1848* (M236, 122 rolls); *The Territorial Papers of the United States: Minnesota, 1849-1858* (M1050, rolls 1-8 of 11).

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