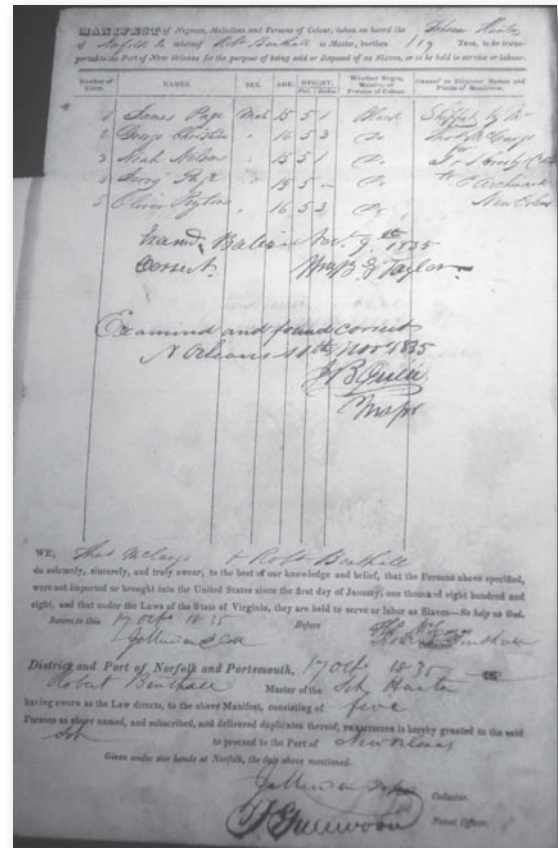


# New Orleans slave manifests, 1807–60



Slave manifest from the schooner, Hunter, M1895, roll 7.

Slavery—the owning of humans as property—is surely one of the saddest and darkest aspects of U.S. history with impacts we continue to feel today. Most of the records created during the slavery era that named slaves as individuals were state, county, or private records. Yet, a number of federal records that named individual slaves do exist.

The newly released National Archives Microfilm Publication M1895, *Slave Manifests of Coastwise Vessels Filed at New Orleans, Louisiana, 1807–1860* (thirty rolls), is one such body of federal records that names slaves as individuals. The records are part of Record Group 36, Records of the U.S. Customs Service. Let’s look at the reason these records were created before discussing the records themselves.

## Historical background

Written in 1786, and adopted in 1787, the U.S. Constitution did not mention slavery or the slave trade directly, but only through oblique references. One of those provisions was Article I, Section 9, which states that:

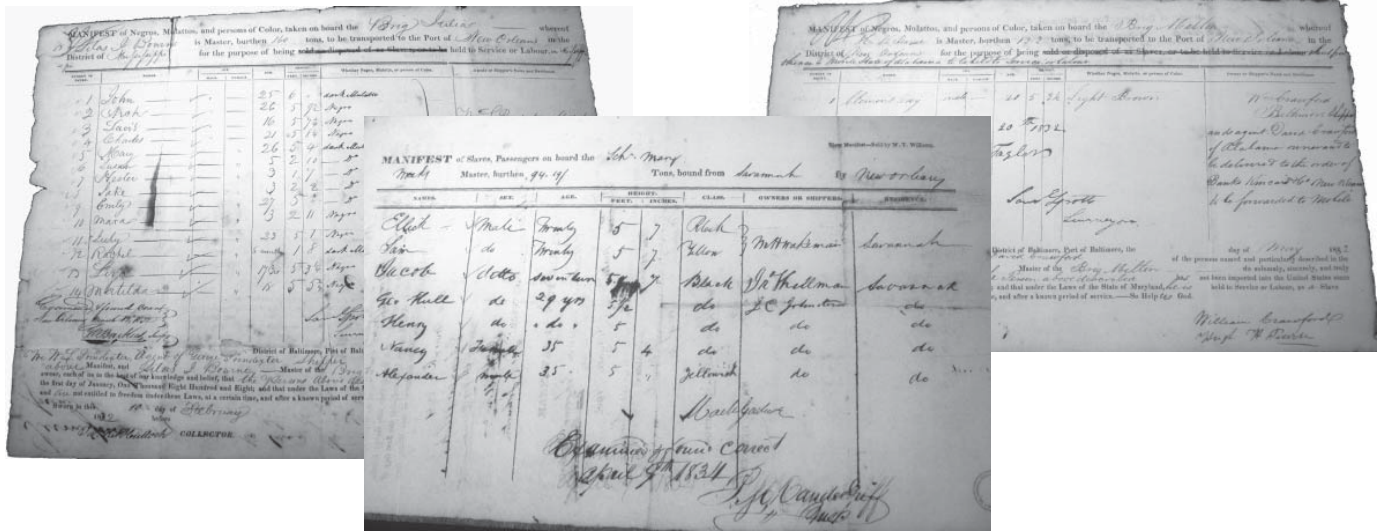
The Migration or Importation of such Persons as any of the States now existing shall think proper to admit, shall not be prohibited by the Congress prior to the Year one thousand eight hundred and eight, but a Tax or duty may be imposed on such Importation, not exceeding ten dollars for each Person.

This provision was born from the sectional struggle in the Constitutional Convention between the northern and southern delegates over three separate issues that had no logical connection. South Carolina delegate General Charles Cotesworth Pinckney insisted that his state and Georgia could not “do without slaves,”

and John Rutledge of South Carolina threatened that the three states of the lower South would secede unless permitted to continue this traffic. The southern states also insisted that export taxes be outlawed and that a navigation act restricting shipping to American flag vessels could only be enacted by a two-thirds majority of Congress. The delegates reached a compromise that forbade federal interference with the slave trade for twenty years, forbade federal taxes on exports, but allowed a navigation act to be passed by a simple majority like any other law.<sup>1</sup>

In 1807, Congress outlawed the African slave trade, effective 1 January 1808 (2 Stat. 426), and in 1820 declared it to be piracy punishable by death (3 Stat. 600–601). Remaining unimpaired, however, were the rights to buy and sell slaves, and to transport them from one slave state to another.

Cotton production grew in economic importance after the invention of the cotton gin in 1793. The South nearly doubled its annual production from 1820 to



1830, doubled it again by 1840, and tripled it again by 1860. By the outbreak of the Civil War, more than half the value of American goods shipped abroad was in cotton. A broad belt of Southern land, ranging in width from about five hundred miles in the Carolinas and Georgia to six or seven hundred miles in the Mississippi Valley, was devoted primarily to cotton culture. The lower South's wealth came chiefly from cotton produced by slaves, although smaller numbers of slaves were also used profitably in the Carolina-Georgia rice fields along the coast, and in the production of Louisiana sugarcane.<sup>2</sup> As cotton growing expanded from Alabama to Texas, the lower South's need for slaves increased also. At the same time, the planters of the upper South had an oversupply of slave labor. Tobacco-raisers in such states as Maryland, Virginia, and Kentucky were suffering from the continued exhaustion of the soil and decline of their export trade. As a consequence, surplus slaves were transported from the one region to the other by slave traders. In 1836, the peak year of this traffic, more than 120,000 slaves from Virginia alone were sold in the lower South. In the 1840s and 1850s, the domestic slave trade slowed somewhat because of a revival of agriculture in the upper South that was partly due to the discovery of better methods of curing tobacco and the introduction of new and superior varieties.<sup>3</sup>

The act of 2 March 1807 (2 Stat. 426), which outlawed the slave trade, also imposed regulations on the coastal transportation of slaves. Effective 1 January 1808, vessels under 40 tons in coastwise trade were prohibited from transporting slaves. The captain or master of vessels over 40 tons in coastwise trade were required to provide a manifest of slave cargo to the

collector of customs at the port of departure and at the port of arrival, or to the surveyor if there was no collector of customs at the port. Specifically, the act provided as follows:

Section 9...That the captain, master, or commander of any ship or vessel of the burthen of forty tons or more...sailing coastwise, from any port in the United States, to any port or place within the jurisdiction of the same, having on board any negro, mulatto, or person of colour, for the purpose of transporting them to be sold or disposed of as slaves, or to be held to service or labour, shall, previous to the departure of such ship or vessel, make out and subscribe duplicate manifests of every such negro, mulatto, or person of colour, on board such ship or vessel, therein specifying the name and sex of each person, their age and stature, ...whether negro, mulatto, or person of colour, with the name and place of residence of every owner or shipper of the same, and shall deliver such manifests to the collector of the port, if there be one, otherwise to the surveyor, before whom the captain, master, or commander, together with the owner or shipper, shall severally swear or affirm to the best of their knowledge and belief that the persons therein specified were not imported or brought into the United States [after 1 January 1808], and that under the laws of the state, they are held to service or labour; whereupon the said collector or surveyor shall certify the same on the said manifests, one of which he shall return to the said captain, master, or commander,

...and authorizing him to proceed to the port of his destination.

Section 10... That the captain, master, or commander... shall, previous to the unlading or putting on shore any of the persons afore-said... deliver to the collector, if there be one, or if not, to the surveyor residing at the port of her arrival, the manifest certified by the collector or surveyor of the port from whence she sailed, as is herein before directed, to the truth of which, before such officer, he shall swear or affirm, and... the collector or surveyor... shall thereupon grant a permit for unlading or suffering such negro, mulatto, or person of colour, to be put on shore.

Thus, two copies were made of each slave manifest. Section 9 required one copy to be inspected, certified, and collected by federal officials before a vessel left port. Section 10 required the second copy, which also had been inspected and certified at the port of departure, to be inspected, certified, and collected by federal officials at the port of arrival.

## Records description

The records included in M1895 are the “inward manifests” required by Section 10 of this act to be filed upon arrival at New Orleans, as well as the “outward manifests” required by Section 9 of the act to be filed before departure from New Orleans. Not all manifests are extant. No inward manifests have survived from the years 1808–1818 and 1858, and no outward manifests have survived from the years 1813–17, 1837, and 1859. Some manifests may have been lost from the years for which manifests are extant.

Most of the manifests are preprinted fill-in-the-blank forms of various sizes. Most are just a single page, while others consist of several pages. Each manifest includes the name of the vessel, its ports of departure and arrival, dates of certification by the collector of customs or other federal official, the captain or master’s name, and a description of each slave on the vessel, including name, age, sex, height, name of owner or shipper, and color. In addition to the official color designations of “negro, mulatto, or person of colour,” many manifests indicate the slaves’ skin color as black, brown, yellow, tawney [*sic*], dark, griffe, or copper. It is assumed that the date of certification by the collector (or surveyor) regarding the accuracy of the manifest was the same as the date of

NAMES	SEX	AGE	STATURE	CLASS	SHIPPERS OR OWNERS	RESIDENCE
Annette	Female	22	5' 4"	Black	M. Ballot	New Orleans
One Infant	Female	11 months		Yellow		

Front image of an outbound slave manifest from the steamship Mexico, M1895, roll 30.

Reverse image of an outbound slave manifest from the steamship Mexico, M1895, roll 30.

arrival or departure. Some single-page manifests have the arrival certification on the reverse side.

The manifests are arranged chronologically, but there may be some disarrangement, and researchers are advised to search an entire year if a vessel’s known arrival or departure on a particular date is not found in the chronological sequence. For the 1821–27 inward manifests, there is a segment of “miscellaneous” manifests following each year’s main sequence of inward manifests.

Ports of departure and intended ports of arrival range as far north as Baltimore, Maryland, on the Atlantic coast, and as far west as Texas ports on the Gulf of Mexico.

## Let’s take a closer look at a few manifests.

On 17 October 1835, Robert Benthall, master of the schooner *Hunter*, presented a slave manifest to the collector and to the naval officer at the “District and Port of Norfolk and Portsmouth” (M1895, Roll 7). The slaves were being shipped by Thomas McCargo for J. & S. Crosby & Co., for delivery to E. Archinard of



Manifest of Slaves on board the *S.S. Mexico* at New Orleans, bound from the Port of La Salle, for the Port of New Orleans.

NAME	SEX	AGE	STATURE	CLASS	SHIPPERS OR OWNERS	RESIDENCE
James	Male	60	5 8	Griffe	J. R. Mott	New Orleans
Ellen	Female	30	5 3	Griffe		
Cora	Female	3		Griffe		
John	Male	25	5 8	Mulatto		
Julia Ann	Female	20	5 3	Mulatto		
Ned	Male	4		Mulatto		
Julia	Female	24	5 3	Griffe		
Victorine	Female	16	5 2	Black		

District of Saluria--Port of La Salle, the 22<sup>nd</sup> day of October 1860.

Inbound front side slave manifest from the steamship Mexico, M1895, roll 16.

District of Saluria--Port of La Salle, the 22<sup>nd</sup> day of October 1860.

I, A. Buchel, Deputy Collector of the Port of La Salle, DO HEREBY CERTIFY, That the within is a true copy of the original Manifest or List of Slaves left on file in this Office; AND I DO FURTHER CERTIFY, that the said Slaves, and the said Master of the *S.S. Mexico*, have this day made oath in the manner directed in the Ninth Section of the Act of Congress, passed the second day of March, 1807, prohibiting the importation of Slaves into the United States. I do hereby authorize the said Master to proceed with the said Slaves named as within, and being in number, to the Port of New Orleans.

Given under my hand at the CUSTOM-HOUSE, SALURIA, the 22<sup>nd</sup> day of October 1860.

A. Buchel  
Deputy Collector

Examined found correct  
New Orleans  
Oct 23 1860  
David Orcutt  
Boarding Officer

Inbound reverse side slave manifest from the steamship Mexico, M1895, roll 16.

New Orleans. The five slaves transported all had surnames, which was unusual:

- James Page, male, age 15, 5 feet 1 inch tall, black
- George Christian, male, age 16, 5 feet 3 inches tall, black
- Noah Nelson, male, age 15, 5 feet 1 inch tall, black
- Jerry Page, male, age 15, 5 feet tall, black
- Oliver Peyton, male, age 16, 5 feet 3 inches tall, black

After the *Hunter* arrived at New Orleans, its cargo was inspected by federal officials on 9 and 11 November 1835.

On the eve of Civil War, on 25 September 1860, M. Callot of New Orleans, the owner of two slaves, and Mr. Talbot, the master of the steamship *Mexico*, presented their slave manifest to Thomas Shields, Collector of the District of New Orleans (M1895, Roll 30). The

manifest named two slaves to be shipped from New Orleans to Galveston, Texas:

Annette, female, age 22, 5 feet 4 inches tall, black

“one infant,” female, 11 months, yellow

The *Mexico* may have dropped anchor at New Orleans often. On 22 October 1860, J. R. Mott of New Orleans, the owner of several slaves, and W. H. Talbot, the master of the steamship *Mexico*, presented their slave manifest to A. Buchel, deputy collector for the port of La Salle, Texas (M1895, Roll 16). The manifest named eight slaves to be shipped from La Salle to New Orleans:

James, male, age 60, 5 feet 8 inches tall, griffe

Ellen, female, age 30, 5 feet 3 inches tall, griffe

Cora, female, age 3, griffe

John, male, age 25, 5 feet 8 inches tall, mulatto

Julia Ann, female, age 20, 5 feet 3 inches tall, mulatto

Ned, male, age 4, mulatto

Julia, female, age 24, 5 feet 3 inches tall, griffe

Victorine, female, age 16, 5 feet 2 inches tall, black

Three days later, on 25 October 1860, the *Mexico* docked at New Orleans, where David Orcutt, “boarding officer,” examined the manifest and the human cargo for the collector of customs at New Orleans.

## How researchers can use these records

African-American researchers may find these records useful if they are able to link a specific person in these records to someone specifically named as sold or shipped in non-federal records. Most of the slaves in these manifests lack surnames. Positive linkage between a name in a slave manifest and someone with the same name in other records may prove difficult.

Caucasians with an ancestor who was a ship captain or master may be successful in learning details about the ancestor’s ship name, sailing routes, sailing dates, and human cargo. Likewise, persons researching slave owners and slave traders may be able to learn more about their human property and business. Researchers with an ancestor who was collector of customs, deputy collector, surveyor, etc., may find that ancestor signing the manifest after inspecting the cargo.


Maritime historians and slave trade historians will be able to learn more about this aspect of interstate commerce.

## For more information

M1895 is available for researcher use at the National Archives Building, Washington, D.C., and at NARA Regional Archives at Anchorage, Alaska; Chicago; Denver; Fort Worth, Texas; Kansas City, Missouri; Philadelphia; San Francisco; and Seattle.

For more information about the slave trade within the United States, see Walter Johnson, *Soul by Soul: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999) and Ralph Clayton, *Cash for Blood: The Baltimore to New Orleans Domestic Slave Trade* (Baltimore: Heritage Books, 2002).

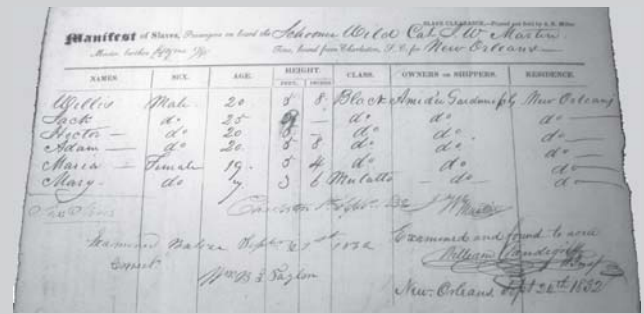
For more information about federal records documenting various aspects of the slave trade, see Walter B. Hill Jr., "Living with the Hydra: The Documentation of Slavery and the Slave Trade in Federal Records," *Prologue: Quarterly of the National Archives*, Vol. 32 (Winter 2000). Part I is online at <<http://www.archives.gov/publications/prologue/2000/winter/hydra-slave-trade-documentation-1.html>> and Part 2 is online at <<http://www.archives.gov/publications/prologue/2000/winter/hydra-slave-trade-documentation-2.html>>

Similar slave manifests also exist for the ports of Mobile, Alabama, Savannah, Georgia, and Beaufort and Charleston, South Carolina, but have not been microfilmed. They are located at NARA's Southeast Region, 5780 Jonesboro Road, Morrow, GA 30260. Similar slave manifests for the port of Philadelphia have not been microfilmed, and are located at NARA's Mid Atlantic Region, 900 Market Street, Philadelphia, PA 19107. 

## Notes

1. Samuel Eliot Morison, *The Oxford History of the American People*, Vol. 1, *Prehistory to 1789* (New York: New American Library, 1972), 400.
2. John D. Hicks, *The Federal Union: A History of the United States to 1865* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1937), 493.
3. *Ibid.*, 497.

**Claire Prechtel-Kluskens**, a microfilm projects archivist at NARA, Washington, D.C., served as NGS registrar (1996–98) and director (1998–2000). She can be reached at <[ckluskens@yahoo.com](mailto:ckluskens@yahoo.com)>. Opinions expressed are her own and do not necessarily reflect the policies of NARA.



## Roll List for M1895, *Slave Manifests of Coastwise Vessels Filed at New Orleans, Louisiana, 1807–1860*

Roll	Type	Date span
1	Inward	1807, 1808–18 (none), 1819–21
2		1822
3		1823–25
4		1826–27
5		1828
6		1829–31
7		1832–36
8		1837–41
9		1842–43
10		1844–45
11		1846–47
12		1848–50
13		1851–52
14		1853–54
15		1855–56
16		1857, 1858 (none), 1859–1860
17	Outward	1812 (one), 1813–17 (none), 1818–23
18		1824–27
19		January–October 28, 1828
20		October 30, 1828–1833
21		1834–36, 1837 (none)
22		1838–40
23		1841–45
24		1846–November 1847
25		November 1847–June 1850
26		July 1850–March 12, 1853
27		March 12–December 1853
28		1854–55
29		1856–57
30		1858, 1859 (none), 1860