

M2025

REGISTERS OF APPLICATIONS FOR THE RELEASE OF IMPRESSED
SEAMEN, 1793-1802, AND RELATED INDEXES

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Funds for this microfilm publication were provided by
genealogists' contributions to the Malcolm H. Stern-NARA Gift Fund
(formerly the Genealogical Coordinating Committee)

The Malcolm H. Stern-NARA Gift Fund
and the
National Archives and Records Administration
1996

INTRODUCTION

On the single roll of this microfilm publication, M2025, are reproduced registers to applications for the release of impressed seamen, 1793-1802, and related indexes. These records are part of the General Records of the Department of State, Record Group (RG) 59, and are designated as Entries 935 and 936 in *Inventory of the General Records of the Department of State, 1789-1949*, Inventory No. 15 (Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1992).

Background

From the end of the American Revolution until the conclusion of the War of 1812, the U.S. Government was concerned with British impressment of seamen on American ships and with the repatriation of men thus impressed. (In some cases seamen were also impressed by French and Spanish naval officers.) An act of May 28, 1796 (1 Stat. 477), authorized the President to appoint agents at foreign ports who were charged with the following duties:

...to inquire into the situation of such American citizens or others, sailing, conformably to the law of nations, under the protection of the American flag, [who are] impressed or detained by any foreign power, to endeavour, by all legal means, to obtain the release of such American citizens or others....

In order for the U.S. Government to obtain "full and speedy information" on impressments, the act also provided that, if the impressment occurred within a foreign port, masters of U.S. ships were to "make a protest" to the American consul. If the impressment occurred on the high seas, it was to be reported to the collector of customs at the first U.S. port at which the vessel arrived. These officials were required to periodically report to the Secretary of State "an account of such impressments or detentions, as shall appear, by the protests of the masters, to have taken place." Vessel masters were further required by the act to transmit a copy of the protest directly to the Secretary of State. The protest was required to state:

...the manner of such impressment or detention, by whom made, together with the name and place of residence of the person impressed or detained; distinguishing also, whether he was an American citizen; and if not, to what nation he belonged.

On March 2, 1799, another act (1 Stat. 731), required the Secretary to submit to Congress an annual statement containing an abstract of the reports received on impressments.

Records Description

This microfilm publication consists of four volumes of registers of applications for the release of impressed seamen, with related indexes.

The spine of the first volume (Entry 935) is labeled with the title, "Index to Register of Applications for Release of Impressed Seamen, 1794-1797," but the inclusive date span is actually July 19, 1793-June 24, 1797. Arranged roughly alphabetically by the first letter of the seaman's surname, it includes the date of application for the seaman's release and the page number where further information can be found in the second volume, Entry 936, volume 1.

The cover of the second volume (Entry 936, volume 1) is labeled "Mr. King's Book," and the inclusive date span is July 19, 1793-June 24, 1797. An inside title page reads:

A Catalogue of Seamen, Stated to be Citizens of the United States and Natives, Impressed from American vessels on board British ships of war, For whose Discharge Applications have been made Through Lord Grenville by Mr. Pinckney And his Successor Mr. King.

This volume is arranged chronologically by date of the application for the seaman's release. For each seaman, the information provided varies, but may include the following: state of which he is a "citizen and native"; name of American ship from which he was taken; name of British ship on which he was carried off; date when he was impressed; evidence of his U.S. citizenship; and result of his application. This volume is indexed by Entry 935.

The cover of the third volume (Entry 936, volume 2) is labeled "Applications for the Relief of Impressed Seamen, 1797 to 1801, David Lenox Agent," but the inclusive date span is actually June 26, 1797-October 4, 1800. An index in the front of the volume, arranged roughly alphabetically by the first letter of the seaman's surname, indicates the page number where further information about the seaman can be found. The substantive contents of the volume are arranged chronologically by date of application for the seaman's release. If known, the following information is provided for each seaman: name of the person to whom the application was made; name of the American ship from which he was carried off; name of the American ship captain; state of which impressed seaman is a "citizen and native"; date of impressment; name of British ship on which he was carried off; name of the British ship captain; evidence of the seaman's citizenship; and result of the application.

The cover of the fourth volume (Entry 936, volume 3) is labeled "Applications for the Relief of Impressed Seamen, &c. 1800. 1802. David Lenox U.S. Agent." The inclusive date span is October 6, 1800-May 1, 1802. An index in the front of the volume, arranged roughly alphabetically by the first

letter of the seaman's surname, indicates the page number where further information about the seaman can be found. The information provided in the substantive contents of this volume is the same as that provided in volume 2, except that the name of the British ship captain is not indicated.

Related Records

Information about other records relating to impressed seamen is located on pp. 259-261 in National Archives Inventory No. 15. Additional information may also be found on the single roll of the National Archives microfilm publication M1839, *Miscellaneous Lists and Papers Regarding Impressed Seamen, 1796-1814*, and in M2026, *Letters Received Regarding Impressed Seamen, 1794-1815*, which is arranged alphabetically by surname of the seaman. Miscellaneous letters regarding the release of impressed seamen, 1812-1815, are also reproduced in M588, *"War of 1812 Papers" of the Department of State, 1789-1815*.