

Searching for Ships' Primary Documents

Imagine that you're interested in finding a specific ship's logbook, journal, or plan. Where do you turn? The logbook probably no longer exists. If it does, it's probably not cataloged anywhere. If it is, knowing which catalog to search is impossible. On the chance that you have identified the right catalog and the logbook's repository, you'll probably still have to travel to get a look at it. If you succeed at all that, pick up a lottery ticket on your way home, because this was your lucky day.

Despite these challenges, ships' logs and journals certainly do exist, and sometimes you can indeed find the one you're seeking. This issue's column is just a primer; there are more advanced options, but any path is a challenge in this sort of quest. **WorldCat.org** is a guide to the holdings of libraries around the world. Its primary use is for locating copies of printed resources such as books, journals, CD-ROMs, microfilms, etc., but it does have manuscript resources—including ships' logs.

For example, a search for "Hydaspe" or "Mattakeeset" at <http://worldcat.org> will show records for these two ships. If you're looking for a vessel with a common name, try including the term "logbooks" in your search. Another option is to limit your results to "archival material" using the "Format" menu on the left side of the results page. You can also find these records directly by searching for the ship names at <http://shipindex.org>; holdings for relevant WorldCat records are in the freely accessible collection.

The problem comes when trying to determine who owns the logbook, because WorldCat often does not display that information. Do not despair; the **National Union Catalog of Manuscript Collections**, also known as NUCMC and pronounced "nuck-muck," usually does. Go to <http://www.loc.gov/coll/nucmc/oclcsearch.html> and select the first search option. From there, type in the vessel name (or the resource name shown in WorldCat) and click "submit query." You should find

a record that matches the one you found in WorldCat, though in a more primitive form. Click on "more on this record" and check "Location" at the bottom of the entry. There, you'll find that all the "Hydaspe" journals are held at the New Bedford Whaling Museum Research Library, and the "Mattakeeset" journal is at Eastham Historical Society Archives, in Eastham, Massachusetts.

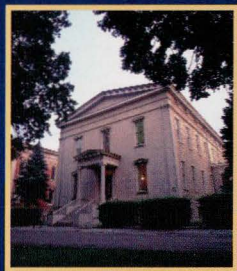
You should call ahead to be sure you can view the document in question and then travel to the library to view it—no one will be offering these items through interlibrary borrowing! Bear in mind that WorldCat is not comprehensive. Thousands of libraries, including many major European libraries, are not included in WorldCat. Many others include their print holdings, but not their manuscripts.

Some institutions have published directories of their logbook collections, but finding these can be difficult. Search in WorldCat for the subject headings "**Logbooks – Bibliography – Catalogs**" and/or "**Ships's papers – Bibliography – Catalogs**." These will guide you to titles such as *Catalog of East India Company Ships' Journals and Logs, 1600–1834*; *Inventory of the Logbooks and Journals in the G. W. Blunt White Library* (at Mystic Seaport); *List of Logbooks of US Navy Ships, Stations, and Miscellaneous Units, 1801–1947*; and *Log of Logs: A Catalogue of Logs, Journals, ... 1788 to 1988, for Australia and New Zealand*. These are *not* reprints of the logbooks, just lists of the logbooks in the institutions' respective collections.

This suggested path is just a start. Searching for such items is tough work, but if you actually find what you're looking for, it is well worth the effort.

Suggestions for other sites worth mentioning are welcome at peter@shipindex.org. See <http://shipindex.org> for a free compilation of over 140,000 ship names from indexes to dozens of books and journals. ⚓

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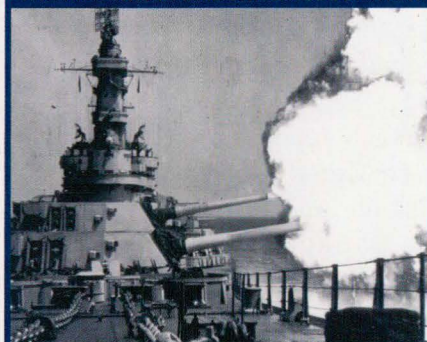
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HNSA would like to hear about topics you think would be of interest (and willing to present) to the naval history and museum ship communities at this year's conference in Philadelphia/Camden, September 18-21. So shoot us your ideas and we'll fire back ASAP!

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