

Tracking Your Ancient Mariners

Genealogy is big business these days, and genealogy databases can be great tools for maritime history research, too. **Ancestry** (www.ancestry.com) is a large company that indexes and digitizes data for genealogists. **FamilySearch** (www.familysearch.org) is the public-facing genealogy side of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, which invests enormous amounts of time and money in their own work in genealogy, to the benefit of all. **FindMyPast** (www.findmypast.com) and **MyHeritage** (www.myheritage.com) round out the largest genealogy companies; together they provide a lot of great resources for folks who want to learn more about their ancestors—including those who went to sea.

If you'd like to find information about ancestors who emigrated to America by sea, these databases are often the best places to look. **Ancestry** offers individual subscriptions, but most public libraries also offer access to their patrons. (You'll need to use this database inside a library; Ancestry does not allow public library patrons to access the database from their homes because it would cut into their profitable individual subscription business.) Ancestry offers millions of indexed names in passenger lists from ships arriving from across the Atlantic, going back as far as 1820, when the US Government first required ships to track arriving passengers. Crew lists are available for several areas, and Ancestry has digitized many Seaman's Protection Certificate applications.

Throughout the nineteenth century, many people traveled back and forth across the ocean, coming to America to work for a period of time, then returning home to Europe to be with their families. It is not unusual to find that an individual, or even complete families, traveled back and forth across the ocean multiple times before finally settling down in the United States.

FamilySearch provides a similar set of content, but offers nearly all of that information for free. While you'll almost always have more success searching for information about a person than about a specific ship, you can find some information by ship in several collections. Passenger lists are more easily found by searching for an individual, but one can search by ship name. All sorts of information can be found in these databases; for example, FamilySearch has digitized and indexed rosters of US soldiers and sailors from the Revolutionary War. If you know an ancestor was a sailor in the war, you may be able to find other information about that person through these sources.

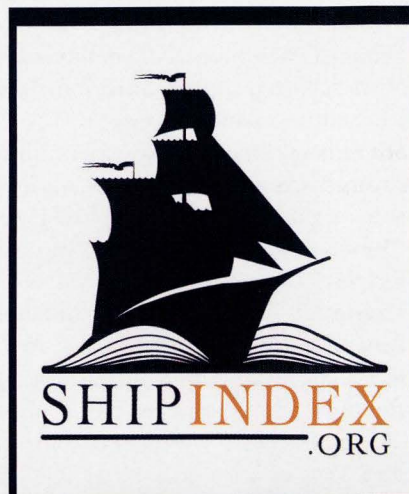
While **FindMyPast** is making inroads in the US market, it is a British company at heart, and has mostly British resources in its databases. It offers records for over a million British merchant seamen from between the two World Wars, in addition to numerous immigration records.

In the United States, we leave most of this to private enterprise (and the Mormons), but in other countries the government underwrites much of this work. The result is that much of their data is freely accessible to all. In Australia, for instance, the state and federal governments have digitized and transcribed many passenger lists. The **State Records Authority of New South Wales** hosts a site that displays many thousands of passenger lists for arrival into Australia, at www.mariners.records.nsw.gov.au. Note that many of these government-created lists are also available in the big genealogy databases. In addition, all of the genealogy companies offer resources focusing on countries around the world, and some offer sites that are especially focused on services for residents of individual countries, such as www.ancestry.se for content related to Swedish genealogy (and also presented in Swedish).

Some unique maritime resources that may not be found in the big genealogy databases include the **National Maritime Digital Library** (www.nmdl.org), which has crew lists from San Francisco, whaling voyages out of New Bedford, and crew lists from Fall River, MA. **Mystic Seaport** offers crew lists from New London, CT, and Salem, MA, at www.library.mysticseaport.org/initiative/CrIndex.cfm. The **Maritime History Archive**, at **Memorial University** in Newfoundland, has digitized and indexed several hundred crew lists for Newfoundland and Labrador, available at www.mun.ca/mha/nlcrews/nlcrews.php.

If you'll be headed out to visit your local library to access Ancestry or other online databases, also consider stopping at a nearby **Family History Center**, which is essentially a local branch of the Family History Library in Salt Lake City. (They can be located via www.familysearch.org/locations/.) These facilities offer access to a range of databases that can be useful in researching ancestors, whether they were sailors or not.

Suggestions for other sites worth mentioning are welcome at peter@shipindex.org. See www.shipindex.org for a free compilation of over 150,000 ship names from indexes to dozens of books and journals. ↓



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