

COAST GUARD

National Archives Building, Washington, DC

Records Relating to Coast Guard Service

The National Archives has records relating to the Coast Guard and its predecessor agencies: the Lighthouse Service, Revenue Cutter Service, and the Life Saving Service. These records are found in RG 26, Records of the U.S. Coast Guard.

Registers of Lighthouse Keepers were compiled chronologically and have been reproduced on M1373, *Registers of Lighthouse Keepers, 1845–1912*. Indexes to each of the volumes are alphabetical by surname of keeper and/or name of lighthouse. The registers include the names of keepers and assistant keepers. The registers typically consist of the person's name; the district and the name of the light; the date of appointment; the date of resignation, discharge or death; and sometimes annual salary.

Correspondence Concerning Keepers and Assistant Keepers, 1821–1902, is arranged alphabetically by surname. These letters may contain: nominations of keepers and assistant keepers with testimonials, lists of examination questions, notifications of appointments, oaths of office, requests for transfer, recommendations for promotion, complaints, petitions, and reports of inspectors and letters of resignation

Records relating to officers of the Revenue Cutter Service include records of officer personnel, 1791–1919, indexed alphabetically by name of officer. These volumes provide dates of service, citations to pertinent correspondence, and charges. There are also copies of commissions, 1791–1910, in two series. One, for 1791–1848, is arranged chronologically as commissions were issued; the other, for 1815–1910, is arranged chronologically and thereunder alphabetically by surname of officer.



Surfmen with their lifeboat equipment in front of a U.S. Life Saving Station in North Carolina in the late 1800s. Records of the U.S. Coast Guard (Record Group 26) include records of processor agencies such as the U.S. Life-Saving Service. (26-CGS-66-02-01)

The records relating to enlisted crew members of the Revenue Cutter Service include muster rolls, payrolls, and shipping articles. In one series of muster rolls are unbound monthly reports, 1848–1910, arranged by name of vessel and thereunder chronologically. They are not indexed, so they can be searched only by name of vessel and the individual's approximate date of service. Muster rolls and payrolls show the name, and, when appropriate, signature or mark of each crew member. The muster rolls for the Revenue Cutter Service/Coast Guard, 1833–1932, provide name, rating, date and place of enlistment, place of birth, age, occupation, personal description, and number of days served during the reported month for each crew member, along with notes if the crewman was detached, transferred, discharged, deserted, or died during the report period. The records are arranged alphabetically by name of vessel.

The shipping articles, 1863–1915, are volumes arranged alphabetically by name of vessel and are not indexed. Use of these records requires knowledge of

the name of the ship and the approximate date of crewman's service. Information includes crewmember's name, rating, wages, date and place of enlistment, place of birth, age, occupation, personal description, and signature or mark.

Useful records to search in the Life Saving Service include registers, service record cards, and articles of engagement. The registers of employees, 1866–1913, usually show the name of employee, post office address, previous occupation, year of birth, year when employee would reach age 55, present age, military service, if any, state from which appointed, date of appointment, compensation, date discharged, and reason for leaving.

The service record cards, 1900–14, show name of employee, legal residence, place of birth, place and status of employment, changes of status, and salary. The cards are arranged alphabetically.

Articles of engagement for surfmen, 1878–1914, are arranged chronologically, and thereunder by district. The article shows a list of surfmen, terms of engagement, and compensation. They may include reports of changes in crew along with the reason for the change and biographical information on new crewmembers. Often, medical inspection reports providing physical descriptions of the surfmen examined are also included.

Coast Guard (Lighthouse Service)

- Registers of Lighthouse Keepers
- Correspondence Concerning Keepers and Assistant Keepers

Coast Guard (Revenue Cutter Service)

- Records of Officer Personnel
- Muster Rolls
- Pay Rolls
- Shipping Articles

Coast Guard (Life Saving Service)

- Registers of Employees
- Service Record Cards
- Articles of Engagement

Additional Sources of Information

Guide to Genealogical Research in the National Archives, third ed., pages 164–165.

Historical Register, U.S. Revenue Cutter Service Officers, 1790–1914

Noble, Dennis L. *Historical Register, U.S. Revenue Cutter Service Officers, 1790–1914*, Washington, DC: USCG Historian's Office, U.S. Coast Guard Headquarters, 1990.

U.S. Life Saving Service, *U.S. Life Saving Service, Annual Reports, 1876–1914*, Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1876–1915.

Canney, Donald L. *U.S. Coast Guard and Revenue Cutters, 1790–1935*, Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1995.

Scheina, Robert L. *U.S. Coast Guard Cutters & Craft of World War II*, Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1982.

Scheina, Robert L. *U.S. Coast Guard Cutters & Craft, 1946–1990*, Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1990