

## **A Publication from the Memorial Maritime History Crew Agreement Archive**

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Working lives are accounted for in impressive detail in a record created under British imperial authority. These are the Crew Agreements and Official Logs of merchant vessels. They have been kept at Memorial since the 1970s. A team, initially led by the late David Alexander, used them to study quantitatively the growth and demise of shipping and seafaring in nineteenth-century Atlantic Canada. Yet, Alexander grasped a larger potential for the documents and just as his interest in social scientists' big questions was almost always connected with the social and economic forces playing out in Newfoundland and Labrador, Alexander began to mine the source for what it might reveal about maritime societies. Serendipity played its part in the records' survival, but it was not by accident they fetched up here.

Too rich to be left only to maritime historians but still needing a specialist gloss, the Agreements are in use daily, now most often in family history research. The curiosity of these users is the first reason why a publication from them is desirable. My study is conceived to reveal the collection's scope, but it will also explain the records' creation, for my aim is to encourage greater sophistication in research. While material from selected Agreements will build upon what family researchers seek when they look for an intimate connection with the past, the volume will also forward critical perspectives that have come from historians' recently changed understandings of how and why we do our work. Scholarship is changed since the days of the Atlantic Canada Shipping Project, though even then researchers had glimpsed a truth: every voyage involved a spatial and historical trajectory that might reward study if treated as unique. This suggestion now resonates with a profession that has become more comfortable with narrative investigations of structure and agency and which recognizes that 'tale-telling' can serve as an effective pedagogy.

Over several years the archivists and I have been making a note of Agreements meriting further investigation. We have an extensive file of references for the period 1860-1920 concerning such matters as work health and safety, quality of life and material culture, gender practices, ethnic and racial tensions, earning and spending wages, emigration and port-life. Workers and migrants from NL and many parts of the world are involved in this archive.

During the academic year 2009-10 a PhD candidate under supervision will take the investigation of these Agreements further. A selection will then be made towards a book-length illustrated publication intended for both a scholarly and popular audience. This is planned to appear in a paper and/or electronic format early in 2011.