

Transport – Ships' Crew

Public Record Office Victoria (PROV) holds records of ships' crew commencing or ending their voyage in Victorian ports from 1852 to around 1922.

Responsibility for the regulation of the engagement and discharge of ships' crew was with the Department of Trade and Customs [VA 606](#) (1851-1901) and the Chief Secretary's Department [VA 475](#) (1901-1922). From 1922 this responsibility passed to the Commonwealth. Researchers seeking records relating to ships' crew after 1922 should contact the [National Archives of Australia](#).

Main Series

[VPRS 566](#) Articles of Agreement (Mercantile Marine Office) 1878 - 1921

These were made at the start of a voyage and completed at the end. The agreements are arranged in bundles by the year of agreement and by the area of trade of the ship (Intercolonial/ Australian, United Kingdom, Foreign going). Within the bundles the agreements are arranged in alphabetical order by the name of the ship.

[VPRS 945](#) Release Books (Mercantile Marine Office) 1857 – 1922

At the end of a voyage the release of the crew was recorded. The Releases were recorded in date order. Separate volumes were used to record the releases for Intercolonial/Australian or Foreign voyages and for steamer voyages.

[VPRS 558](#) Seamen's Discharge Certificate (Mercantile Marine Office) 1882 – 1922

This series comprises counterfoils (or stubs) of Certificates of Discharge issued to seamen upon their discharge or upon payment of their wages between 1882 and 1922. The books of counterfoil stubs are arranged in chronological order by the date of discharge, and according to the area of trade of the ship.

[VPRS 2144](#) Register of Deserters and Discharged Seamen 1852 – 1922

This is a microfilm copy of the original registers (VPRS 946) and is available in the North Melbourne and Ballarat Reading Rooms. Registers recorded the date of desertion, the name of the ship and its origin, the name of the seaman and his place of birth, age, height and colour of eyes and hair. Additional details were sometimes recorded. The Registers are arranged chronologically by the date of report of the desertion. Each volume contains an index to ships from which the seamen have deserted.

Film 3 includes ships' crew leaving the service at Geelong 1856 – 1888. Details recorded include the date of discharge, name of the ship and master, name of the crew member, capacity in which he served, area of trade of the ship, the last vessel on which the seaman served and his character, and the net wages paid to the seaman. Ages and places of birth were included in later entries.

[VPRS 22](#) Customs, Shipping and Immigration Records 1839 – 1898

This series includes the Registers of Seamen engaged for the time frame 1856 – 1889. Please refer to the Records Description lists in the PROV Reading Rooms to determine which unit to order.

[VPRS 4320](#) Register of Seamen Prisoners 1853 – 1885

This is a microfilm copy of the original registers (VPRS 528) which have been closed under Section 11 of the Public Records Act in the interests of preservation. The microfilm can be found in PROV's Reading Rooms. The purpose of these registers was to record details about seamen who were imprisoned on the hulks. Information about the prisoners includes a personal description, name of ship, offence, sentence, date of conviction, the name of the hulk where confined and the date when discharged from custody.

Accessing the Records

Records can be ordered through PROV's online catalogue for viewing at the Victorian Archives Centre Reading Room. See [PROVguide 20 Searching for Records Online](#) and [PROVguide 21 Ordering Records](#) for information.

For more information about the records you can click on the hyperlinked entries or do a **Find by Number** search on PROV's online catalogue using the Series (VPRS) number.