

# Researching Mariners and Vessels for the Ancestors

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A sloop.

If we ask the question "why" we are on the right track. Perhaps you can imagine the tumultuous voyage across the Atlantic and the fear of getting lost, or being sunk in a storm. When one considers the vast number of ships discovered at the bottom of the sea dating back several hundred years, it is easy to understand the risks. Ships kept manifests of its passengers and cargo. When a mariner set out to deliver supplies, he signed a contract concerning possible loss.

I found several contracts for cargo going to Sunbury, Georgia in the colonial

deeds. Oftentimes, the cargo was spoiled. This is because of delays in passage. Had I not read the colonial deeds, I would not have known that Sunbury was an active port city and resort for New Englanders. Although the National Archives has a collection of ship manifests, it is incomplete for many reasons. One finds the notations of the occupation of "mariner."

These were sailors or seamen navigating waterborne vessels, or ones who assisted in the operation and maintenance of ships. Many vessels used in the colonies were sloops, one-masted with a fore-and-aft mainsail. The Dutch used sloops to trade in the colonies before England cut off their trade. The traffic from the Mediterranean seas into the Atlantic was filled with cargo vessels.

Sometimes we discover an old will made by a mariner about to take voyage, and passengers did the same. Consider, then, the port of embarkation as a place to discover such a document. A little research of the ports and routes of trading vessels and places of embarkation might discover a document of someone who died on the high seas yet resided in Virginia or the Carolinas at one time!