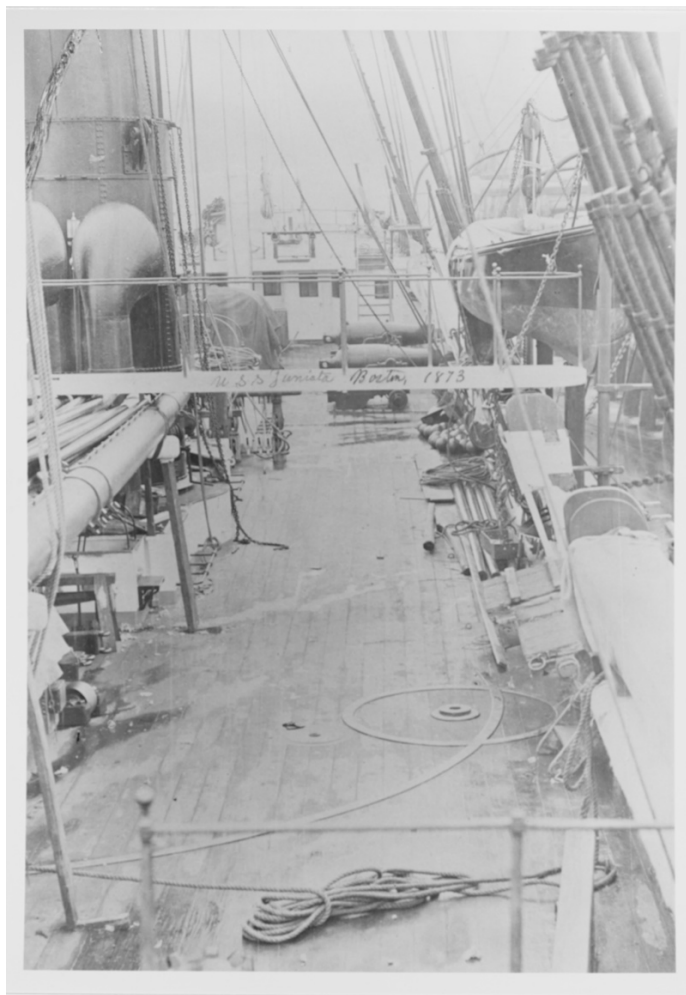


Delaware Genealogical Society – Delaware African American Genealogical Society

# Bluejacket Research Project

Kenneth J Finlayson, President, DGS

---



*USS Juanita looking aft from Fore-castle-1873-Boston*

May 2023

## Background

The Delaware Genealogical Society (DGS) and the Delaware African American Historical and Genealogical Society (DEAAHGS) partnered recently with the Bluejacket Project, an Arts and Humanities Research Council UK-funded project managed by historians of Northumbria University and the University of Sheffield UK. The U.S. Naval Academy Museum in Annapolis, Maryland, is also a partner.

The project's full title is *Civil War Bluejackets: Race, Class and Ethnicity in the United States Navy, 1861-1865*.

The primary goal of the Bluejacket project is to transcribe and produce publicly available data on 118,000 currently digitized Civil War sailor records that will provide a resource for further research and discovery of the experience of both African American and immigrant sailors and their interactions with native-born white servicemen.

Zooniverse, the world's largest and most popular volunteer-powered research platform, manages the record transcription process. This project has over 1,000 volunteers transcribing the digitized data drawn from the muster rolls of the Civil War vessels.

The Bluejacket project will run until February 2025. The project seeks to link the primary digitized data to other wartime records such as enlistment, pension, and other wartime data to create a Civil War Sailor Internet Resource.

The Bluejacket Project partnership with DGS and DAAHGS focuses on deep genealogical research on African American sailors who enlisted as native-born Delawareans. Bluejacket project managers maintain a research approach that emphasizes allowing local autonomy in research direction to explore different avenues and perspectives to promote innovative and diverse research outcomes.

The local DGS-DEAAHGS research project aims to produce narratives documenting the experiences of the post-war working-class lives of African American, immigrants, and white sailors who spent years working and living together in confined and unhealthy wartime conditions aboard U.S. Navy vessels. The objective is to identify experiential variables that may inform specific reliable group comparisons that are not present in the military records.

## The DGS-DEAAHGS Project Update

The Delaware Genealogical Society and Delaware African American Historical and Genealogical Society have completed the primary data collection of native Delaware African Americans (A.A.) Civil War sailors. The data sources were the National Park Service (NPS) *Sailor's Database* and Ancestry's *U.S. African American Civil War Sailor Index, 1861-1865*.<sup>1</sup>

We have 1,558 muster dates assembled on 341 sailors assigned to 209 ships. We also collected, as value-added data, the names of A.A. sailors from surrounding counties in Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Maryland. There are 61 Pennsylvania, 33 New Jersey, and 166 Maryland sailor's data in these counties sequestered in case we need to review regional data.<sup>2</sup>

Staff sorted the data collection format according to each sailor's muster date. The sort produced a chronological list of musters with the specific vessels displaying an easily identifiable service configuration. This confirmed a pattern of sailors staying with the same vessel once permanently deployed. It also exposed duplicate muster rolls related to vessel transfers. When a sailor had transferred to a new ship, the previous vessel erroneously entered the transferred sailor's name in their next muster roll. This error made it appear in the unsorted NPS muster rolls that the sailor had transferred back to their previous vessel when they had not done so.

Sorting by enlistment date revealed 11 Delaware AA Civil War sailors who enlisted and reenlisted before the Civil War. The earliest initial enlistment was in 1848. A review found that the Navy universally rated African American sailors with standard Landsman and Ordinary Seaman ratings. A complete manual browse of the *U.S. Naval Enlistment Rendezvous, 1855-1891* records up to 1860 documented 18 Delaware-born AA sailors, many of whom reported mariner occupations and all given standard Navy ratings. This review, although limited, validated W. Jeffrey Bolster's description of the Navy's historical reliance on African American mariner skills in his book, *Black Jacks*.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> The NPS is the primary source. NPS derived the data from Howard University's transcriptions of digitized enlistment and quarterly muster rolls of Navy vessels. Ancestry uses this data in their index.

<sup>2</sup> This data from counties adjoining Delaware are filtered from downloaded complete state lists of AA sailors.

<sup>3</sup> Bolster, W. Jeffrey. *Black Jacks: African American Seamen in the Age of Sail*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1997.

We also reviewed rendezvous data in eleven centers (24 enlistment places). New York and Philadelphia were the primary enlistment centers during the War, with 112 and 159 Delaware AA enlistments, respectively. We initially speculated that those who enlisted in the smaller centers were residents of those locations. A random survey, however, does not support that assumption. Instead, post-war residency appears widely dispersed. In addition, Philadelphia and New York, the major centers, also lack reliable patterns despite the temptation to assume they are employment magnets and, therefore, sailors' local residences. We discontinued further analysis pending our upcoming genealogical research that would provide more reliable results.

On the criteria "Occupation" (before enlistment) in Philadelphia, of all 152 Delaware-born enlistees there, 16 (10.5%) reported their occupation as a mariner, and 9 of those 16 (56%) received the rating of Seaman or above. New York produced similar ratios. However, a closer review of New York and Philadelphia data provides clarity. For example, of the 112 who enlisted in New York, nine sailors received ratings of Ordinary Seaman or Seaman. However, only four received the higher rating at enlistment. The Navy either promoted the other five to a higher rank later or, more likely, the higher rating resulted from reenlistment, revealing the risk of only using the enlistment data in muster rolls to determine rating analysis.

Also, muster data does not capture any sociocultural aspects of African American participation in the Civil War. Muster data, therefore, do not manifest any specific discriminatory treatment. However, the data does support a long historical pattern of reliance on African American mariner skills and fair treatment with ratings. Sociocultural aspects may become more visible in our later single-vessel analysis.

With a focus on more detailed research, DGS transcribed and documented all the sailors on the USS Juniata in the muster roll of 16 July 1864. Of the 209 ships, this vessel had the most native-born Delawareans on their muster roll. The Navy formed the USS Juniata's entire roster in Philadelphia while in repair in early 1864.

The total roster is 161 sailors, confirmed by the roster summary. In addition, there are 11 Delaware AA sailors, 15 other A.A. sailors, 29 Irish sailors, 41 European sailors, and 65 sailors one could call 'fair complexioned' U.S. sailors.

The USS Juniata became part of the South Atlantic Blockading Squadron at Hampton Roads and was involved in the intense offensive operations of the first and second attacks on Fort Fisher, North Carolina, in December 1864 and January 1865.

## Future Ongoing Research

The project now has all the data on the 161 sailors on the USS Juniata on 16 July 1864. This provides data on the characteristics of that group without contamination from other variables.



*USS Juniata*

HyperLink	Ship's No.	Last Name	MI	First Name	Rating	Date of Enlistment	Where Enlisted	Term	Received Vessel	Born	Residence State	Age	Occupation	Complexion	Remarks
<a href="#">Link 13</a>	57	Millis		Benjamin	Landsman	1864-06-29	Philadelphia	3	Princeton R, S	Wilmington, Delaware	Pennsylvania	29	Not Recorded	Not Recorded	Listed a Black on Delaware NPS list
<a href="#">Link 13</a>	126	Nicholas		George	Seaman	1864-07-10	Philadelphia	3	Princeton R, S	Italy	Not Recorded	34	Mariner	Swarthy	Left side lower jaw injured
<a href="#">Link 13</a>	115	Neat		John	Seaman	1864-06-13	New York	3	Princeton R, S	Scotland	Not Recorded	30	Not Recorded	Swarthy	
<a href="#">Link 13</a>	17	Oldham	C	John	Landsman	1864-05-20	Philadelphia	3	Princeton R, S	Virginia	Pennsylvania	22	Boatman	Dark	Black. On NPS site. Same enlistment etc.
<a href="#">Link 13</a>	117	Payne		Henry	Seaman	1864-06-13	New York	3	Princeton R, S	England	Not Recorded	25	Mariner	Florid	
<a href="#">Link 13</a>	62	Parker		Alfred	Ordinary Seaman	1864-06-23	Philadelphia	2.75	Princeton R, S	Halifax, N Scotia	Not Recorded	30	Carpenter	Light	"Army"
<a href="#">Link 13</a>	65	Phillips	E	Charles	Ordinary Seaman	1864-07-29	Philadelphia	2.2	Princeton R, S	Genoa, New York	New York	23	Sailor	Light	
<a href="#">Link 13</a>	60	Price		Joseph	Landsman	1864-06-30	Philadelphia	3	Princeton R, S	Wilmington, Delaware	Pennsylvania	22	Not Recorded	Black	Scar left cheek
<a href="#">Link 13</a>	58	Price	H	James	Landsman	1864-06-29	Philadelphia	3	Princeton R, S	Wilmington, Delaware	Pennsylvania	29	Not Recorded	Black	
<a href="#">Link 13</a>	54	Pilkinton		Matthew	Landsman	1864-06-28	Philadelphia	3	Princeton R, S	England	Pennsylvania	27	Weaver	Fair	M.P. left forearm

However, attempting research on each sailor's experience onboard the ship during the Civil War is problematic. The ship's data and even the ship's logs do not provide sailor-specific experiential information. Creating an accurate experiential narrative within the context of the USS Juniata is, therefore, impossible.

A more reliable research approach would be to capture the sailor's post-Civil War genealogical history and compare the resulting African American, Irish, and White biographical material. The USS Juniata's common skills and wartime environment provide a distinctive research base for post-Civil War variables that might facilitate viable socioeconomic information and group comparisons. For example, did Irish and African American sailors with comparable maritime skills, navy rating, and service on the same vessel during the War have different employment histories after the War?

## Research Strategy

### *Introduction*

Given the limitations of accessing experiential information from the USS Juniata's ship logs and data and the challenges of establishing reliable links between post-war biographical information and wartime experiences, the research strategy involves focusing on the genealogical history of each sailor after the Civil War and comparing the biographical material of African American, Irish, and White individuals to identify variables that may inform specific group comparisons related to their ship experiences.

This exploratory research approach, therefore, aims to reveal post-Civil War variables that can provide information for reliable group comparisons. It is possible to compare groups based on some unmistakable variables. For example, large deltas in post-war employment between groups would suggest formidable discriminatory influences despite identical war service records. Other efficacious variables might be differences in post-war migration, age at death, cause of death, and observable differences in family development and support. We can only determine the meaning and reliability of these intergroup variables after collection and review.

### *Methodology*

The research strategy, therefore, is first to review the genealogy of African American sailors who served on the USS Juniata during the Civil War. Then, the aim is to identify biographical variables suitable for intergroup comparison. Finally, once recognized, we will collect the same biographical data on the Irish and White sailors in the USS Juniata.

*Research Hypothesis: There is no significant difference between the post-war biographical variables of African American, Irish, and White sailors who served on the USS Juniata during the Civil War.*

## *Steps*

1. Reviewing and summarizing the genealogical history of the 11 native-born Delaware and the 15 other African American Sailors on the USS Juniata. Researchers will examine primary and secondary sources on each sailor. Such sources may include the birth of the sailor, a list of residencies by date, employment/unemployment information, criminal activity, marriage, marriage location, spouse name, date of birth, place of birth, names and dates of births of children, death of a spouse, cause of death of spouse, death of sailor, and cause of death of sailor. Link all reference information to each primary and secondary source.
2. Upon completion of the genealogical history of the A.A. sailors, we will review the data and identify the biographical variables that are good candidates for intergroup comparison.
3. Adjust data collection forms and instructions. This step will also include a discussion of the need for additional volunteers and the assembling of a research field guide.
4. Complete the genealogical history of all 29 Irish sailors who served on the USS Juniata.
5. Review Irish data to identify genealogical group patterns. Determine any new data that might register null data in the previous data variables with African American sailors. Adjust African American data to include any null variables.
6. Complete an analysis of the African American - Irish intergroup.
7. Complete the genealogical history of all 161 sailors on the USS Juniata.
8. The research will conclude with a final statistical and result analysis.

## **Implications**

In February 2025, the Bluejacket project will have an extensive collection of military information on 118,000 Union sailors who served during the Civil War. Having documented this data on over 600 African American sailors born in four states who served on over 200 ships, we can confirm that this collection will provide comprehensive genealogical information and opportunities on an extensive previously undocumented historical group—U.S. Civil War sailors of all cultural backgrounds.

Historians and genealogists will have resources that contain birth locations, pre-war occupations and residencies, age, enlistment dates and locations, navy ratings, and ship assignments. This data links to rendezvous center enlistment data, military pensions, census records, city directories, marriage records, and even land records, the whole universe of genealogical data.

It is the aim of the DGS—DEAAHGS research project is to provide an example of deeper genealogical insight into the multitudinous variables that point back to the historic fabric of an inhuman naval experience in a terrible war with sailors of all ethnic backgrounds living tightly together in the context of slavery so bad it caused the very War they were fighting together.

While our post-war variables may reliably show differences among groups of sailors, they will not answer the questions of the many historical descriptions of life on a naval vessel during the Civil War. We hope they will, like the Bluejacket project itself, provide a resource for further research and discovery of the experience of African American and immigrant sailors and their interactions with native-born white servicemen.

While the variables on intergroup comparability may serve as a valuable resource for further research, underneath it all, our project also yields detailed biographical portraits of those 161 sailors who served together aboard a single ship, the USS Juniata, during the Civil War. It should be quite a 'band of brothers' story.



