

What a Register Can and Cannot Tell Us

GRADES 6-8 · HISTORY AND SOCIAL SCIENCE, ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS, MATHEMATICS, DIGITAL LITERACY AND COMPUTER SCIENCE · GLOUCESTER

What can an official list of names tell us about the past, what can it not tell us, and how do historians check it?

Two 50-minute class periods

In October 1876 the Gloucester fishing schooner Joseph F. Allen was lost on Western Bank, a fishing ground off Nova Scotia, with all 10 men aboard. What we know about them comes mostly from two lists: a book printed in Gloucester in 1882 and the city's Lost at Sea register, a list of thousands of names put together by volunteers. In this lesson you will act as an archivist. You will compare the two lists, test what the register can and cannot tell us and use a spreadsheet to investigate all of Gloucester's recorded losses in 1876. Throughout, remember that every row is a person.

Data table

R1. The Joseph F. Allen in the city register (classroom table)

This table shows every 1876 register row that names the Joseph F. Allen, plus one row for another schooner (row 79) that you will need for Activity A2. Cape Ann Current built the columns from the register's facts and put place names into plain words. "(not recorded)" means the register gives no information for that column.

The register's notes for the ten October entries say the whole crew of 10 was lost with the vessel on Western Bank. They offer two possibilities for how: the schooner either foundered (filled with water and sank) or sank while at anchor. None of the sources in this lesson describes anyone seeing what happened.

Row	Name as recorded	Date as recorded	Vessel	Listed as master?	Age recorded	Marital status recorded	Birthplace recorded	Residence recorded	Where lost (as recorded)	Whole crew lost with vessel?
46	McMillen, John	1876 Apr 18	Joseph F. Allen	No	24	single	Port Hood, Cape Breton	(not recorded)	Grand Bank	No
73	McAuley, John	1876 Apr	Joseph F. Allen	No	45	single	London, England	(not recorded)	Grand Bank	No
79	McMillan/McMillen, John	1876 May [19]	Saratoga	Yes	34	married	(not recorded)	(not recorded)	Georges Bank	Yes
100	Brown, James	1876 Oct 16	Joseph F. Allen	No	(not recorded)	single	Nova Scotia	(not recorded)	Western Bank	Yes

Row	Name as recorded	Date as recorded	Vessel	Listed as master?	Age recorded	Marital status recorded	Birthplace recorded	Residence recorded	Where lost (as recorded)	Whole crew lost with vessel?
101	Brown, Joseph	1876 Oct 16	Joseph F. Allen	No	(not recorded)	single	Nova Scotia	(not recorded)	Western Bank	Yes
102	Campbell, Alpheus	1876 Oct 16	Joseph F. Allen	No	(not recorded)	single	Nova Scotia	(not recorded)	Western Bank	Yes
103	Campbell, John	1876 Oct 16	Joseph F. Allen	Yes	(not recorded)	single	Nova Scotia	(not recorded)	Western Bank	Yes
104	McDonald, Angus	1876 Oct 16	Joseph F. Allen	No	(not recorded)	single	Nova Scotia	(not recorded)	Western Bank	Yes
105	McDonald, Smith	1876 Oct 16	Joseph F. Allen	No	(not recorded)	single	Nova Scotia	(not recorded)	Western Bank	Yes
106	McNare, William	1876 Oct 16	Joseph F. Allen	No	(not recorded)	single	Nova Scotia	(not recorded)	Western Bank	Yes
107	Rogers, William	1876 Oct 16	Joseph F. Allen	No	(not recorded)	single	Nova Scotia	(not recorded)	Western Bank	Yes
108	Russell, Thomas	1876 Oct 16	Joseph F. Allen	No	(not recorded)	single	Nova Scotia	(not recorded)	Western Bank	Yes
109	Woodbury, Lewis	1876 Oct 16	Joseph F. Allen	No	(not recorded)	single	Nova Scotia	(not recorded)	Western Bank	Yes

Source: Facts from the City of Gloucester Archives Committee, Lost at Sea register (PDF dated July 29, 2010), based on the work of Roberta Sheedy; table compiled by Cape Ann Current. Row numbers match the full 1876 data sheet. <https://gloucester-ma.gov/74/Lost-at-Sea>. Rights: Facts from the City of Gloucester Lost at Sea register; table compiled by Cape Ann Current

Primary source

R2. The Fishermen's Own Book: the J. F. Allen

Transcribed from a scan; spelling as printed. The book prints a long dash after "Crew list"; it is shown here as a colon. "Sch." means schooner.

Sch. J. F. ALLEN, 62.63 tons, owned by B. Maddocks & Co., lost on Western Bank in October. Value, \$4,625; insurance on vessel and outfits, \$5,025. Crew list: John Campbell, master; William McNare, Joseph Brown, James Brown, Alpheus Campbell, Woodbury Lewis, Angus McDonald, Smith McDonald, William Rogers, Thomas Russell.

Source: Procter Brothers, The Fishermen's Own Book (Gloucester: Procter Brothers, 1882), page 72. Scan of the University of California copy on the Internet Archive. <https://archive.org/details/fishermensownboo00procrich>. Rights: Public domain (published 1882)

Primary source

R3. The Fishermen's Own Book: two men lost earlier in 1876

Transcribed from a scan; spelling as printed. This is part of a longer sentence; [...] marks words left out. A dory is a small rowboat that fishermen used to tend their lines away from the schooner.

[...] John McMillan and John McAuley from sch. J. F. Allen, April 18; [...] all on Grand Bank.

Source: Procter Brothers, The Fishermen's Own Book (Gloucester: Procter Brothers, 1882), page 74, from the 1876 section headed "Lost in Dories" <https://archive.org/details/fishermensownboo00procrich>. Rights: Public domain (published 1882)

Primary source

R4. The Fishermen's Own Book: Gloucester's year, 1876

Transcribed from a scan; spelling as printed.

27 vessels, 1 fishing boat and 212 men were lost this year. The vessels covered a tonnage of 1,691.44 tons, and were valued at \$150,000, with \$116,222 insurance. Of the lost seaman [sic], 54 left widows, and 112 children were made fatherless. 167 men went down in their vessels, 21 were lost overboard, and 24 were lost in dories while visiting their trawls. 9 vessels were lost on Grand Bank, 6 on La Have Bank, 3 on Georges, 3 in the Bay St. Lawrence, 3 in the Winter shore fishery, and 1 each in the Western Bank, shore mackerel and herring fisheries. 12 vessels and 90 men were lost in a series of gales extending from Dec. 9 to 16.

Source: Procter Brothers, The Fishermen's Own Book (Gloucester: Procter Brothers, 1882), page 70, opening paragraph of the 1876 section <https://archive.org/details/fishermensownboo00procrich>. Rights: Public domain (published 1882)

Summary by Cape Ann Current

R5. About the Gloucester Lost at Sea register

Who made it. The register was put together by the Gloucester Archives Committee, a volunteer group that works with the city's archives. It is based on research by Roberta Sheedy, who gathered names for the memorial plaques at the Fisherman's Statue on the Boulevard. Volunteers have expanded and updated it since. The version used here is a long PDF dated July 29, 2010.

What it covers. The list began with Gloucester fishermen. The city says it now includes people who drowned anywhere, at sea, in the harbor or in rivers and lakes, and also some people on shore whose deaths were connected to the sea. Each entry gives a name, a date and a vessel. Other columns list the compilers' sources, short notes about the person's family, age and status, a mark for fishing or trading and a description of the circumstances.

Where its facts come from. Each entry lists codes for its sources. For the ten October 1876 entries for the Joseph F. Allen, one code points to the Cape Ann Advertiser, a Gloucester newspaper, for a Jan. 12 issue. Other codes appear to

point to city records.

Abbreviations. The city's key explains short forms used in the register, including: ae = age; b. = born; res. = resident of; sch. = schooner; NS = Nova Scotia; CB = Cape Breton; NFD = Newfoundland.

Is it complete? No. The city says plainly that the list cannot be complete and that the names of everyone from Gloucester lost at sea will probably never be recovered. It invites corrections and additions through the Archives Committee.

How Cape Ann Current built the classroom table. We took the facts in the register's 1876 entries and put them into new columns: name and date exactly as recorded, plus our own plain-language columns for role, age, marital status, birthplace, residence, where lost, fishing or trading and whether the whole crew was lost. We did not copy the compilers' notes or source codes. Ages appear only when the register gives one. One 1876 entry, about a teenager, is not included, so the classroom table has 211 rows. The full table is in the data sheet.

Source: Written by Cape Ann Current from the City of Gloucester Archives "Lost at Sea" web page and the register PDF dated July 29, 2010 <https://gloucester-ma.gov/74/Lost-at-Sea>. Rights: Cape Ann Current summary; facts from City of Gloucester sources

A1. Source the register

Use Reading 5. Answer in complete sentences and point to the sentence in the reading that supports each answer.

1. Who compiled the register, and whose earlier research is it based on?
2. For what original purpose were the names first gathered? How might that purpose shape which names were included?
3. The list has grown beyond its first purpose. Give one example of a kind of entry it now includes.
4. What does the city say about whether the list is complete? Why would a city say this about its own record?
5. Using the abbreviation key, what would "ae 24, single, b.PortHood,CB" mean in plain words?
6. Is the register a primary source, a secondary source or something in between? Defend your answer.

A2. Two sources, one crew

Compare Reading 1 (register) with Reading 2 and Reading 3 (the 1882 book). First fill in the comparison chart: list the ten crew members as the book prints them in one column and as the register records them in a second column. Put a check next to names that match exactly. Then answer the questions, citing row numbers or exact words.

1. Which crew member's name is written differently in the two sources? Copy both versions exactly.
2. The register lists names surname first, like "Brown, James." What are the two possible full names for the man the book calls "Woodbury Lewis"? Can you tell from these sources which is correct? Explain.
3. The book says the J. F. Allen was lost "in October." The register records "1876 Oct 16." A date in a compiled register can mark the day a vessel sailed, the day it was last seen, the day of a storm or a date chosen later. What does "date as recorded" mean, and how should a careful writer report this date?

4. 4. The register says each of the ten men was born in Nova Scotia. The book's title page says it lists men and vessels lost "from the port of Gloucester." What does the register record about where the men lived? Write one sentence that is true to the evidence about birthplace, residence and homeport.
5. 5. Rows 46 and 73 are also J. F. Allen entries, but from April. Use Reading 3 to explain why the register lists 12 rows for this schooner, not 10.
6. 6. The book spells one April name "McMillan." The register spells it "McMillen" in row 46. Now look at row 79. Is row 79 the same man as row 46? Give at least two pieces of evidence.
7. 7. What does the register tell us that the book does not? What does the book tell us that the register table does not? Give one example of each.

A3. Statistical questions

A statistical question expects answers that vary and accounts for that variety. For each question, decide (a) whether it is statistical and (b) whether the 1876 register table can answer it fully, partly or not at all. Explain each choice in one sentence.

1. 1. How old was John McMillen of the Joseph F. Allen?
2. 2. How old were the men in the 1876 table?
3. 3. On which fishing ground were the most rows recorded in 1876?
4. 4. Where were the men in the 1876 table born?
5. 5. Where was the Joseph F. Allen built?
6. 6. How many men were aboard each vessel lost with its whole crew?
7. 7. What did John Campbell, the master, think about the October trip?
8. 8. In which months of 1876 were losses recorded?

A4. Spreadsheet investigation: Gloucester's recorded losses, 1876

Open your copy of the data sheet. Freeze the top row and turn on a filter. For each task, write your answer and the steps you used (for example, "Filtered Vessel to Joseph F. Allen"). Clear all filters before starting the next task. Remember that a blank cell means the register gives no information, not that the answer is "no."

1. 1. How many rows does the table have? What is one row? Find a row that stands for more than one person.
2. 2. Filter Vessel to show the Joseph F. Allen. How many rows appear? Sort them by Date as recorded.
3. 3. Filter "Exact day given?" to Yes. How many rows give an exact single day? What percent of all rows is that? Round to the nearest whole percent.
4. 4. Sort or filter by "Where lost (as recorded)." Which two fishing grounds have the most rows? Make a bar chart of the five places with the most rows, with a title and labeled axes.
5. 5. Filter "Whole crew lost with vessel?" to Yes. How many rows? How many different vessels? Look closely at the vessel names: is any vessel recorded in two ways?
6. 6. How many rows record a residence? How many record a birthplace? List the places recorded as residences. Find the rows for Rockport and for Manchester.

7. 7. Use Find to search for "Anderson, Charles" and "McMillen." What do you notice? What does this tell you about using names alone to identify people?
8. 8. Write one question about Gloucester in 1876 that this table cannot answer, and name a source that might.

A5. Check the register against the book

Use Reading 4 and your spreadsheet results. For each pair of numbers, say whether they match, and give one possible reason if they do not.

1. 1. The book says 212 men were lost in 1876. How many people does the classroom table account for? (Hint: one row stands for 4 men, and one entry was left out of the classroom table.)
2. 2. The book says 54 of the lost men left widows. How many rows in the table record the man as married? How many say "married or" something else?
3. 3. The book says 167 men "went down in their vessels." How many rows say the whole crew was lost with the vessel? Why might these two numbers be counted differently?
4. 4. The book says only 1 vessel was lost in the Western Bank fishery. Filter Where lost to Western Bank. Which vessels appear, and how can both sources be right?

Talk about it

- Why does it matter whether we write "lost Oct. 16, 1876" or "recorded as lost Oct. 16, 1876"? Who could be misled by the first version?
- The ten men of the Joseph F. Allen were born in Nova Scotia and sailed from Gloucester. What is the difference between saying they were "Gloucester men" and saying they "sailed from Gloucester"?
- When two sources spell a name differently, which one should a memorial use? Who should decide?
- The register leaves out some things on purpose and misses others by accident. Give an example of each.
- The city invites the public to send corrections. What kind of evidence would you need before asking the city to change an entry?
- Why do you think a town keeps a list like this at all, more than a century later?

Show what you learned

Write a register report of two to three paragraphs to the Gloucester Archives Committee explaining what the Lost at Sea register can and cannot tell us. Use the Joseph F. Allen and the 1876 table as your evidence. Your report must (1) make a clear claim; (2) cite at least three specific pieces of evidence, including at least one row number from the register table and one quotation from the 1882 book; (3) explain one name variant and what a date "as recorded" means; (4) report at least one spreadsheet finding as a number or percent; (5) name one reason the register is incomplete and one way it could be checked or improved; and (6) keep birthplace, residence and homeport separate and use respectful language about the men.

Points: 32