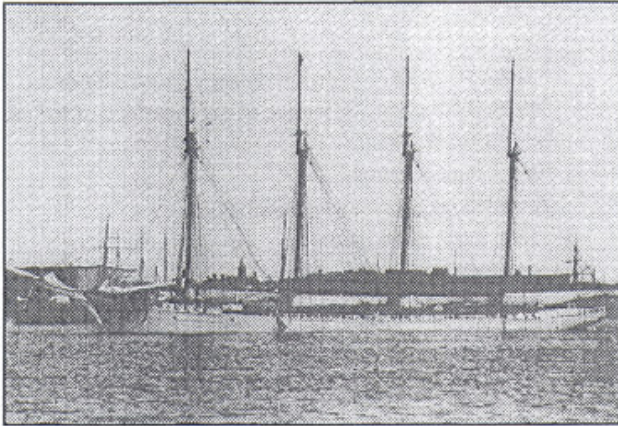




## Crews of the Coal Carriers Victims and Survivors of Palmer-Crary



*The sinking of the Frank A. Palmer and Louise B. Crary was a tragic event that resulted in 11 deaths. Those individuals were just over half the members of the combined crews. With vessels as large as these (274 and 267 feet), it is remarkable that there were so few people employed to man them. The great coal schooners were bulk carriers, and the crews they employed (except for the captain, mate and engineer) were hired for their ability to work hard rather than their technical skills. During the late 1800s and early 1900s, the crews were generally immigrants, many coming from Scandinavia and Germany. This was quite evident with the Palmer and Crary.*



*The Frank A. Palmer had a captain plus crew of nine during its last voyage. Photo courtesy of Paul C. Morris..*

No large cargo vessels, whether sail or power driven, have ever been so economical of man power as were the big sailing colliers," wrote Lt. W.J. Lewis Parker in his book "The Great Coal Schooners of New England 1870-1909." He cited the fact that, "In terms of freight capacity they could nearly carry 250 tons more cargo for every crew member than their most efficient rivals in this respect, the present-day diesel cargo vessels."

The advent of the steam donkey engine provided the mechanical "muscle" needed for many of the heavy lifting tasks, allowing vessels to sail with low crew numbers. According to Parker, "All told the crew of the seven-mast-

ed *Thomas W. Lawson*, largest of the schooners, numbered only 16 men: a captain, two mates, engineer, steward, and eleven foremast hands. The five and six-posters carried eleven to fourteen men, and a four-sticker eight or ten men. The rough rule generally exceeded by one or even two placed the number in a schooner's crew at two men per mast. Despite well-placed steam hoisting engines which greatly lessened the heavy work of "sweating up" the halliards and weighing anchor, the big schooners were not altogether unjustly criticized for being undermanned."

The records according to the newspapers of the time indicated that the *Crary* had a crew of 11 and the *Palmer* a crew of 10 on their fateful last voyages. These numbers were low although within the general bounds for that type of ship. Besides being short staffed, the schooners tended to attract less skilled immigrant workers.

Noted Parker, "Coastal shipping by the end of the 19th century had ceased to draw native-born seamen to a career at sea. A survey of crews in 1900 estimated that only 10 percent were Americans, the rest being predominantly Scandinavian and German born." Representative crew lists closely corroborate this statement. "The foremost hands on the *Louise B. Crary* when she was sunk in collision with the *Frank A. Palmer* in December of 1902 included a German, a Swede, a Norwegian, a Newfoundlander, a South American, an unknown seaman, and one "Louis Stein." The *Palmer* had two Norwegians, two Finns, a Swede, two Americans, and a "white-washed Yank" or Scandinavian American."

Whether it was language barriers, overwork or indifference, the survivors could not identify the members of their own small crews. Neither steward could be identified (other than country of origin -- *Palmer's* from Portugal and *Crary's* from Greece). Various spellings for crew names were reported by shipping company representatives and the newspapers. Seamen had little fidelity to individual ships, and shipping companies hired hands for legs of voyages rather than maintaining full-time crews at higher cost.

The tough working conditions and small crews, delays caused by inclement weather, and possibly language barriers all may have been factors in the collision.



## Crew Lists

### Crew of the Frank A. Palmer

(based on newspaper records from December 1902)

James E. Rawding -- Captain  
Vinton (also Winters) – Mate  
Edward Summerville (also Somerville, Sommerville)  
(Providence, RI)– Engineer  
Unknown name (possibly Portuguese origin) – Steward  
Franz Banta (also Forns Rantour) – seaman  
Axel W. Lundstrom (also Alex Lindstrom) (Hanover St., Boston)– seaman  
Daniel Carlsen (Charles St., Boston) – seaman  
Sven Rhienterson (also Svend Reinhard, John Reinhart)  
(Providence, RI) – seaman  
John Rhenheine (also Rheinhelme) (Bennet St., Boston) – seaman  
Hjalmar Schoyen (Cherry St., NYC) – seaman

### Crew of the Louise B. Crary

(based on newspaper records from December 1902)

William H. Potter (Orient, LI) – Captain  
William B. Smith (Portland, ME) (English origin) – Mate  
Peter Dache (also Zacne) – Engineer  
Unknown (Greek origin) – Steward  
Olaf Berg – Seaman  
Gust Johnson – Seaman  
Louis Stein (also Sten) – Seaman  
Hans Blank – Seaman  
David Shanahan -- Seaman  
Barney (unknown address/origin) – Seaman  
Possible additional unknown seaman

W.H. Howland – engineer on the Crary was originally reported lost, but it was determined that he left the ship in Philadelphia before Thanksgiving and later shipped on board the P.T. Barnum

Frank Rehnberg was originally listed as one of the victims taken to the hospital but the name was later changed to John Rhenheine.

## Reports from Shipping Commissioners

In response to inquiries after the collision, the U.S. Shipping Commissioner at Boston provided the following names as individuals who shipped with the Frank A. Palmer on November 4:

C. Elfvorsen, 25, Swede, seaman  
Edward Jorgensen, 29, Norwegian, seaman  
Axel W. Lundstrom, 20, Finlander, seaman  
Franz Banta, 24, Finlander, seaman  
D. Carlsen, 48, Finlander, seaman  
Albert Spearing, 35, American, seaman

Captain Rawding reported that he had paid off three of his crew at Newport News but was unable to say just which ones, according to the Boston Globe (Dec. 22, 1902)

A dispatch from the I.S. Shipping Commissioner in Philadelphia gave the names of six members of the crew of the Louise B. Crary:

Hans Blank, German  
David Shanahan, Newfoundlander  
Louis Stem, Norwegian  
Gus Johnson, Swede  
Olaf Berg, Norwegian  
Peter Lache, South America

