

Selected Commercial Wage Rates in the North East, 1940

Note: Annual BLS bulletins show us that many of those working in the New York City building trades made approximately \$1.50 an hour in the late 1920s. Some wages fell a bit in the early years of the Depression, to \$1.40 or so (for those who were still working), but they climbed back quickly and by 1940 were pushing beyond \$1.50, up to \$1.75 or more.

Generally, naval officers at the Brooklyn Navy Yard and at other navy yards were ordered not to consider the building trades as comparable, and so did not collect data from them for their calculations of local prevailing wages. They did collect wage data for the 1940 wage board hearings from other local businesses and some of that data is presented here.

If the private business reviewed did not work forty-hour weeks, as the BNY did, the wage board officers adjusted the hourly rates to show what the yards' workers would have received if they worked a forty-hour week for the same paycheck they otherwise got. For example, in talking with the BNY mechanics, Commander Mays explained that his board thus adjusted the flat rate that one group of Federal Shipyard mechanics were paid to a comparable 98 cents an hour, then set the intermediate rate at \$1.029, and finally, added six cents to get \$1.089 an hour for the maximum rate. This was the rate they used to compare to the \$1.104 Brooklyn machinists then were paid. The machinists' representative agreed to this as fair. [Commander Mays, transcript of meeting with Machinists' committee, 1 April 1940, *Wage Board Hearings, 1940*; RG181; NA-NY.]

Sample hourly wages as found by the BNY 1940 Wage Board, adjusted by BNY officials for a 40-hour week:

Federal Shipbuilding	Kearney, New Jersey		
First-class			
apprentices	.795		
Laborers, all	.625		
helpers	.675		
Chipper & Caulkers	1.01	.93	.822
Electricians	1.075	.982	.85
Loftsmen	1.13	1.075	.93
Machinists	1.075	1.01	.903
Painters	.955	.905	.85
Patternmakers	1.13	1.042	.905
Pipefitters	1.01	.93	.85
Sheetmetal	1.01	.928	.85
Shipfitters	1.01	.928	.85
Electric welders	1.075	.983	.85

Todd shipyards of Robbins and Tietjen, in Brooklyn and Hoboken, 42 hours, converted:

Laborers	.62	.58	.53
First-class app.	.72		
Helpers	.68	.63	.58
Chipper & Caulker	.98	.89	.77
Electricians	.98	.81	.77
Machinists	1.10	.98	.77
Patternmaker		1.05	
Pipefitter	.98	.95	.77
Sheetmetal	1.05	.98	.85
Shipfitter	1.12	.98	.77
Electric welders		.98	.86

Bethlehem Steel, Brooklyn shipyards, 42 hours, converted:

Laborers		.60	
First-class app.	.73		
Helpers	.68		
Chipper & Caulker		.98	
Electricians	.98	.89	.77
Loftsman	1.10	.98	
Machinists	.98	.89	.77
Painters	.98	.80	.68
Patternmaker	1.10		
Pipefitter	.98	.89	.77
Sheetmetal		.98	.89
Shipfitters		.98	.89
Electric welders		.98	.89

Wage data use for determining wages for selected BNY Shops, 1940:

Sewers:

Surveyed Companies	Rates		
Coventry Shop, East 47th St. upholsterers,		.75	
Dumble, Edwin, W 97		.75	
Hesselbach, E 31		.75	
Kent Shops, E 44, upholsterers		.75	
Kraus & Sons, E 22 embroiderers	1.150		
W & J Sloane, 47 & 5th	.603	.543	.466
Stern Brothers, W42 dept. store	.609	.546	.503
Average = .634	.647	.647	.471
Proposed	.696	.636	.576 - No Change

Shipfitters:

Bethlehem Fletcher, Hoboken*		.98	.89
Staten Island*		.98	.89
Shewan, Brooklyn*		.98	
Morse, Brooklyn*		.98	.89
(building and repairs)			
Brewer Drydock & Repair, SI*		.98	.89
repairs			
E-4	1.05	.960	.870
Federal Shipbg and Drydock	1.01	.928	.850
Kearny, NJ			
Luders Marine Const, Stamford		1.00	.80
Standard Oil, NYC, ^ Pet. products~	1.35	1.245	1.135
Todd Shipyard			
Robbins, Brooklyn*	1.12	.98	.77
Tietjen & Lang, Hoboken*		.98	
Average = 1.035	1.165	1.017	.906
Proposed	1.092	1.032	.972
No change			

~ oil refinery skewed things

Electric welders:

Bethlehem Fletcher*		.98	.89
Bethlehem SI*		.98	.82
Bethlehem Shewan*		.98	
Bethlehem Morse*		.98	.89
Brewer Drydock		.98	.847
Ira Bushey, Bklyn,*		.98	
ship repairs			
D Costigliola, Brkln*		.98	
shipbldg repairs			
E-4	1.06	1.00	.92
Federal	1.075	.983	.85
Foster Wheeler, Carteret NJ	1.13	1.08	.896
mfrs power plant mach			
GE, Schenectady, elect eqmnt	1.16	1.015	.864
Great Lakes Dredge & Dock*		.90	
NYC repairs and dredge			
Luders Marine		1.00	.75
Perth Amboy Drydock, repairs*		.98	
Standard Oil^	1.35	1.245	
Todd Robbins*		.98	.86
Todd Tietjan & Lang*		.98	
Average = .993	1.149	1.005	.867
Proposed	1.092	1.032	.972
No change			

Machinists:

Bethlehem Fletcher*		.98	.77
SI*	.98	.89	.77
Shewan*		.98	
Morse*	1.08	.98	.83
Brewer Drydock*	.98	.89	.77
D Costagliola*		.98	.86
E-4	1.07	1.00	.914
Federal	1.075	1.01	.903
GE	1.281	1.012	.985
Great Lakes Dredge & Dock*			.90
R Hoe, E138, mach man		1.10	
Frank McWilliams, SI drydocks			
Luders Marine	1.00	.75	.70
Henry Nevins, City Island* boatbuilders	1.00	.96	.84
Perth Amboy Drydock*	.98	.90	.88
Sperry Gyroscope, Brooklyn man nautical equip	1.096	.971	.878
Standard Oil^	1.245	1.135	1.045
Todd Robbins*	1.10	.98	.77
Todd Tietjen & Lang*		.98	
Western Electric, Kearney man elect equip	1.227	1.09	.95
Average = 1.024	1.166	1.048	.927
Proposed change	1.108	1.048	.988
Presently	1.104	1.044	.984

Painters:

Bethlehem Staten Island*	.98	.89	.80
Bethlehem Morse*	.98	.80	.68
E-4	1.04	1.00	.92
Federal	.955	.905	.85
Four Boro Contracting* Brklyn, paint, scaling		1.00	
John F Foster, E75, painters		1.00	
Luders Marine*	1.00	.70	.625
Frank McWilliams*		.98	
Henry Nevins*	.88	.84	.72
Perth Amboy Drydock*	.80	.75	.70
Western Electric	1.06	.935	.89
Average = .922	.994	.960	.836
Proposed	1.104	1.044	.984
No change			

Electricians:

Bethlehem Fletcher*		.98		
SI*	.98	.89		.77
Shewan*	.98			.77
Morse*	.98	.89		.77
Brewer Drydock*		.98		
Ira Bushey, brklyn, ship repairs*		.98		
D Costagliola*		.86		
E-4	1.10	1.00		.895
Federal	1.075	.982		.850
Foster Wheeler	1.05	.950		.88
GE	.99	.885		.780
Luders Marine		.85		.80
Perth Amboy Drydock*	1.09			
Smith-Meeker Eng. Co.*	1.40	1.25		
NYC, contractors				
Sperry Gyroscope	1.01	.85		.581
Todd Robbins*	.98	.81		.77
Todd Tietjan & Lang*	.98	.95		.72
Average = .916	1.046	.842		.814
Proposed	1.176	1.116		1.056
No change				