



# Introduction to Immigration Research October 2023

# Tips to Research Immigrant Ancestors

- Search US Records for Clues: Census, burial records, obituaries, military records, citizenship records and passports. Look for place of origin, birth year, year of arrival, port of arrival and whether naturalized.
- Look for your ancestor's birth name in passenger lists. Note that this may not be the name he or she used after arriving in America.
- Search for women by their married and maiden names.



# Tips To Research Immigrant Ancestors (cont.)

- Search without a last name if you know the arrival port and/or the year. (Use other terms like birth year, arrival port, and year of arrival.
- Use spelling variants and wildcard search techniques. (An asterisk (\*) stands in for zero or more letters, and a question mark stands in for one letter.
- Look at the origins of your ancestors' relatives and neighbors. Look for folks in the neighborhood in the census, and witnesses on marriage records and naturalizations. Folks from the same town often migrated and settled near one another.



# Tips to Research Immigrant Ancestors

- Use the one-step webpages by Stephen P. Morse ([www.stevemorse.org](http://www.stevemorse.org)) and Ellis Island ([www.libertyellisfoundation.org](http://www.libertyellisfoundation.org)), use a Soundex system that works well for Eastern European names.
- Check every page in the document for lists of people from the same place.
- Know the port and arrival date. This is often on microfilm, but it is slowly being scanned and indexed. (The National Archives have microfilm for more than 100 ports. The most used ports were New York, Boston, Baltimore, Philadelphia and New Orleans.



## • **Know the History of Immigration in the United States**

- 1620: The “Great Migration” begins with 20,000+ arriving in New England in 20 years.
- 1790: Free white persons can become citizens after two years of residence in the United States.
- 1795: The Naturalization Act increases citizen applicant residency requirement to 5 years, with 3 years notice of intent to file for citizenship.
- 1798: Residency requirement increases to 14 years with 5 years of notice.
- 1802: The Naturalization Act of 1798 is repealed.
- 1807: Congress bans importation of slaves. (Smuggling continues.)
- 1820: Laws requiring ships’ captains to submit passenger lists go into effect.
- 1845: Ireland’s Great Potato Famine begins, causing a million Irish to migrate to the US in 5 years.
- 1855: Castle Garden immigration deport opens on Manhattan’s Battery.
- 1868: Burlingame Treaty encourages Chinese immigration.
- 1870: Laws state that African-Americans could become citizens, but Asians could not.
- 1875: U.S. immigration law excludes criminals and women “brought in for lewd and immoral purposes.”
- 1881: German immigration peaks over the next four years, with a million settling in the Midwest.
- 1882: Chinese Exclusion Act is passed. Other laws exclude lunatics, convicts, and those likely to become public charges.
- 1892: Ellis Island opens and remains a key immigrant processing center until 1924. (Exce

- 1894: U.S. immigration restrictions are extended to arrivals at Canadian ports.
- 1900: Ellis Island reopens in December.
- 1906: The federal government assumes control over citizenship process.
- 1910: Angel Island immigration station opens in San Francisco Bay, processing many Asian immigrants.
- 1918: President Woodrow Wilson issues a proclamation requiring passports for international travel.
- 1921: The Emergency Quota Act sets annual admission of certain ethnic groups based on their percentage in the 1910 census.
- 1922: A woman's citizenship becomes independent from that of her husband.
- 1924: National Origins Act set the annual admission of certain ethnic groups to 2% of those nationalities population in the 1890 census. American Indians are declared citizens.
- 1933: Immigration and Naturalization Service is formed.
- 1940: Resident noncitizens must register with the government.
- 1943: The United State repeals the Chinese Exclusion Act.
- 1945: US GIs' war brides are exempted from immigration quotas.
- 1947: Congress relaxes immigration restrictions for WWII displaced persons, especially those from Eastern Europe.

# IMMIGRATION RECORDS QUICK GUIDE

RECORD	ERA	DESCRIPTION	INFORMATION PROVIDED
<b>Early customs lists</b>	pre-1820	Only a handful of passenger lists for ships arriving before 1820 are known to exist.	varies
<b>Customs passenger lists</b>	1820–1891	Starting in 1820, the United States required arriving ships to turn over passenger lists to customs officials. These early lists vary by the port and have sparse information.	passenger name, age, occupation, sex and nationality; ship name; port of departure; date and port of arrival
<b>Immigration passenger lists</b>	1891–onward	The US government provided forms for passenger lists after assuming responsibility for immigrant processing. Information requested increased over time.	the above, plus literacy, money carried, name of person who paid passage, last place of residence and more (detail increases in later lists)
<b>Oaths of allegiance</b>	Colonial era and onward	The colonies of Pennsylvania and New York required foreigners to swear an oath. Continental Congress required the oath in 1778.	name of person, ship name, date, allegiance being renounced
<b>Declarations of intent (also called declarations of intention)</b>	1790–onward	Potential citizens had to file these “first papers” after living in the United States a proscribed amount of time (this varied with current law). They then had to wait a minimum length of time before filing a petition to naturalize.	name, names of spouse and children, birth date and place, address, nationality; detail increases with later records

<b>Petitions to naturalize</b>	1790–onward	The second step in the naturalization process involved filing a petition or “second papers” in court. A judge could grant or deny the petition.	name, date of naturalization and witnesses’ names
<b>Alien case files</b>	1940 and onward; most are 1944 and later	These document Immigration and Naturalization Service (now US Citizenship and Naturalization Services or USCIS) investigations into citizenship applicants.	varies, but may include depositions, witness testimony, correspondence, documents submitted as proof of identity and more
<b>Visa files</b>	1924–1944	Visa files document immigrants admitted for permanent residence after July 1, 1924. They’re available through March 31, 1944.	visa application; birth, marriage and military records; health certificate; criminal background check from the person’s home country; affidavit of support
<b>Alien registrations</b>	1940–1944	The Alien Registration Act of 1940 required noncitizen residents age 14 and older to register with the government.	name, other names used, residence, birth date and place, date and port of arrival in the United States, marital status, height, weight, occupation, criminal history and more
<b>Passport applications</b>	1795–onward	Until 1952, passports weren’t required for foreign travel except for brief periods during wartime. Many citizens obtained them for easier traveling.	increases in later records and may include name, residence, citizenship status, immigration details, intended destination, reason for and expected length of travel
<b>Passenger and Immigration Lists Index (PILI)</b>	1500s–1900s	This book series indexes a wide range of immigration records for the United States and Canada.	varies, often including name, immigration/emigration date, place of origin, port, and the source providing the information
<b>Emigration records</b>	1500s and onward	These records may include departing passenger lists or names of departing emigrants who registered with their local police.	varies, often including name, immigration/emigration date, place of origin and ports of departure and arrival



ONLINE CLASSES	MICROFILM, BOOKS AND REPOSITORIES	NOTES
<p>Find digitized books listing arrivals by searching Ancestry.com &lt;<a href="http://www.ancestry.com">www.ancestry.com</a>&gt;, FamilySearch Books &lt;<a href="http://www.familysearch.org">www.familysearch.org</a>&gt; and Google Books &lt;<a href="http://books.google.com">books.google.com</a>&gt;.</p>	<p>NARA has microfilm of transcribed arrivals to New Orleans (1813–1819) and Philadelphia (partial, 1800–1882). Find published indexes by searching WorldCat &lt;<a href="http://www.worldcat.org">www.worldcat.org</a>&gt; for the place and early passenger lists.</p>	<p>The Passenger and Immigration Lists Index (see below) indexes many early immigration sources.</p>
<p>Ancestry.com and FamilySearch.org have a range of indexes and images; find some on ImmigrantShips.net &lt;<a href="http://www.immigrantships.net">www.immigrantships.net</a>&gt;. New York records are indexed at Castle Garden &lt;<a href="http://www.castlegarden.org">www.castlegarden.org</a>&gt;.</p>	<p>Find at the Family History Library (FHL); National Archives (NARA) in Washington, DC; and NARA regional offices and large genealogical repositories covering the location of the port of arrival.</p>	<p>Search with the birth name of the immigrant. Microfilmed lists are arranged by port, arrival date and ship name.</p>
<p>Ancestry.com and FamilySearch.org have a range of indexes and images; find some on ImmigrantShips.net. New York records are at EllisIsland.org &lt;<a href="http://www.libertyellisfoundation.org">www.libertyellisfoundation.org</a>&gt;.</p>	<p>same as for immigration passenger lists</p>	<p>Passenger information on most lists spans two pages; check both.</p>
<p>Early oaths are in digitized books and transcribed lists at Ancestry.com and Hathi Trust &lt;<a href="http://www.hathitrust.org">www.hathitrust.org</a>&gt;. Later oaths were part of naturalization records.</p>	<p>Search for oaths of allegiance on WorldCat to find published sources, and check state archives and historical societies for the area.</p>	<p>Before 1778, a “foreigner” in the American colonies was anyone not British.</p>
<p>Ancestry.com, Fold3 &lt;<a href="http://www.fold3.com">www.fold3.com</a>&gt; and FamilySearch.org have a variety of digitized records and indexes. Also see digitized county court records on FamilySearch.org.</p>	<p>Until 1906, these could be filed in any court. Search the FamilySearch catalog by place and check state archives for microfilm and published indexes. Request copies from the court where records were filed. After 1906, order through the USCIS Genealogy Program &lt;<a href="http://www.uscis.gov/genealogy">www.uscis.gov/genealogy</a>&gt;.</p>	<p>A declaration of intent expired if the immigrant didn’t file a petition to naturalize in a timely manner. Therefore, you might find multiple declarations for one person.</p>

<p>Ancestry.com and FamilySearch.org have collections spanning 1795 to 1925; Fold3's dates from 1795 to 1905.</p>	<p>Records from 1795 to 1925 are on microfilm at the FHL, NARA facilities in the Washington, DC, area, and many of NARA's regional facilities.</p>	<p>A man's passport covered family traveling with him. Starting in 1920, wives got their own passports. Photos are first included in the 1910s.</p>
<p>Search various versions of this periodically updated resource on genealogy sites such as Ancestry.com and HeritageQuest Online.</p>	<p>Look for volumes in print at libraries with large genealogy collections.</p>	<p>Always try to locate the source record for the indexed information.</p>
<p>Findmypast.com &lt;www.findmypast.com&gt; has Liverpool departures (1890-1960). Search surviving Bremen departures at &lt;www.passengerlists.de&gt;. Search Liverpool; Gothenburg, Sweden; and Hamburg departures on Ancestry.com.</p>	<p>Search for the keyword emigration in the FamilySearch online catalog and narrow by place.</p>	<p>PILI indexes many emigration records, so a search may lead you to these sources.</p>

# Sample of Websites

- **Angel Island Immigration:** [www.aiisf.org](http://www.aiisf.org)
- **Castle Clinton (Castle Garden):** [www.nps.gov/cacl](http://www.nps.gov/cacl)
- **Cyndi's List (Check categories for ports of Entry, Ships and Passenger Lists, Immigration and Naturalization, Ports of Departure, and Societies & Groups Ethnic Heritage :** [www.cyndislist.com](http://www.cyndislist.com)
- **Ellis Island:** [www.libertyellisfoundation.org](http://www.libertyellisfoundation.org)
- **German Emigration and Immigration Records and Resources:** [germanroots.com](http://germanroots.com)
- **FamilySearchWiki: U.S. Emigration and Immigration:** [www.familysearch.org/learn/wiki/en/United States Emigration and Immigration](http://www.familysearch.org/learn/wiki/en/United_States_Emigration_and_Immigration)
- **The Great Migration: A Survey of New England 1620-1640:** [www.greatmigration.org](http://www.greatmigration.org)



# Sample of Tutorials on Immigration

- **Immigration and Naturalization:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mhGvWwGOh1s>
- **Lesser Known Ports of Immigration:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5yG6qyhnCPw>
- **Immigration and Naturalization Records at the National Archive:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OCZTSrSvxyc>
- **Proven Ways to Find Your Immigrant Ancestors:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SxDbhOu-1Y>

