

RT2447: They Didn't All Come Through Ellis Island! Finding & Analyzing Passenger & Customs Lists

by Katherine R. Willson (moonswings@gmail.com, www.SocialMediaGenealogy.com)

A second handout with maps will be distributed in class

In this presentation, we will discuss:

- 1) **WHAT** information might be found on passenger & customs lists,
- 2) **WHEN** the three significant time periods for immigration were,
- 3) **WHERE** the major ports of European departure and entry into the U.S. were located,
- 4) **HOW** names were recorded as our ancestors stepped on & off the ships, and
- 5) **HOW** to find passenger and customs records online and off-line, and analyze these lists as a means of filling in your ancestors' life stories.

1) **WHAT** (*Ship's Manifests vs. Arrival Lists vs. Departure/Outbound Lists vs. Customs Lists*)

Passenger lists were created at the port of departure prior to sailing, and **MAY** give us the following information about our immigrant ancestors:

- Ship name
- Date & place of departure
- Date & place of arrival
- Full name
- Age
- Place of birth
- Marital status
- Race
- Profession
- Nationality
- Height, hair & eye color
- Place of last residence
- Final destination within the U.S.
- U.S. relative's name & address
- Home country contact person's name & address
- Previously in U.S. (when, where & for how long)
- Who paid for passage?
- Amount of money with passenger

2) **WHEN** - There were 3 distinct time periods for immigration:

- Pre-1820 (most are lost or destroyed, remaining lists are primarily published in Filby's *Passenger and Immigration Lists Bibliography, 1538-1900* [index available at Ancestry.com] and Lancour's *Bibliography of Ship Passenger Lists, 1538-1825*)
- 1820 to 1891 (U.S. Customs Passenger Lists - not much detail)
Castle Garden (1855-1890)
- Post-1891 (Immigration Passenger Lists - a bit more detail)
Ellis Island (1892-1954)

3) **WHERE** (*While New York was the largest port of entry, any location bordering a large body of water or other countries were all possible entry points into the U.S.*)

There have been 300+ official ports into the U.S., but the six major ports of the 1800's and 1900's were:

- New York, NY
- Boston, MA
- Baltimore, MD
- Philadelphia, PA
- New Orleans, LA
- San Francisco, CA

4) HOW (*Know the full name - including variations or nicknames - of immigrant, his/her age, approximate date of arrival into the U.S. and probable port of entry*)

Major European Ports of Departure (many had to get to these points to board U.S.-bound ships)

- Liverpool, England
- Bremen, Germany
- Hamburg, Germany
- Antwerp, Belgium
- Naples, Italy

Gathering Clues Here in the States FIRST

What stories have been passed through the generations that may help identify the ship?

Who might be in possession of family documents that may give clues?

- Letters to/from the Home Country
- Photographs
- Journals
- Family Bibles
- Newspaper clippings
- Naturalization papers
- Passports/passport applications
- Homestead files

Additional sources:

- Ethnic or biographical publications
- Census forms
- Alien Registration cards
- Border Crossing lists

FINDING PASSENGER LISTS ONLINE (links active as of 01 Dec 2015)

- www.Ancestry.com (\$) → Card Catalog → Immigration & Travel → Passenger Lists → Filter by location & date
- www.FindMyPast.com (\$) → Search → Immigration & Travel
- www.MyHeritage.com (\$) → Research → Immigration & Travel
- www.FamilySearch.org → Browse all published collections → Migration & Naturalization → Filter by location & date
- www.EllisIsland.org → Passenger Search → One Page Form
- www.CastleGarden.org → Search (note the use of a wildcard)
- www.GeneSearch.com → second category "Passenger Lists and Immigration Records" (comprehensive list of immigration records available for 36 states, U.S. Territories, Canada and Mexico)
- www.CollectionsCanada.gc.ca/Databases → English → Passenger Lists (4 options)
- www.SteveMorse.org → "About this website and how to use it" (located at top center)
- aad.archives.gov/aad/series-list.jsp?cat=GP44 (note the absence of www) – lists from the National Archives' Archival Databases
- www.CyndisList.com/ships → Ship Lists General and Ship Lists Specific

FINDING PASSENGER LISTS ONLINE (continued)

- www.passengerlists.de (use far left column for searches)
- immigrants.byu.edu → “Search for Ancestors”
- www.packrat-pro.com/ships/shiplist.htm - “Pilgrim Ship Lists Early 1600's”
- www.freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.com/~pagermanpioneers - “Palatine German Immigrant Ships to Philadelphia 1727-1808”
- www.OliveTreeGenealogy.com/ships/search_ships.shtml - Search engine under “Ships Passenger Lists”
- www.TheShipsList.com → choose 3rd link (“Passenger Lists”) under category of “Ships - Fleets and Descriptions, Passenger Lists, Resources”
- userdb.Rootsweb.Ancestry.com/passenger (note the absence of www)
- www.PriceGen.com (Indentured Servants) → Database
- www.ImmigrantShips.net
- www.GalvestonHistory.org/Galveston_Immigration_Database.asp → Attractions/Sites → Galveston Immigration Database

TIPS:

- 1) First thoroughly research all your possible sources here in the States (family papers, news clippings, census/naturalization paperwork, etc.) before searching for foreign documents.
- 2) Treat every piece of data you encounter as “possibly true” – find corroborating evidence!
- 3) Use blank extract forms to record all data and notations/markings from a single entry (or family) in a passenger list. Extract forms available online from Harrisburg, PA’s Capitol Area Genealogical Society at www.capitalareagenealogy.org/page_18j.htm
- 4) Notations/markings on lists give us important clues – review Marian L. Smith’s webpage, “A Guide to Interpreting Passenger List Annotations” at www.JewishGen.org/infofiles/manifests
- 5) The Port of Departure wasn’t necessarily where your immigrant ancestor lived – it may have been the last portion of a European journey before arriving in the States.
- 6) If you can’t find your immigrant ancestor on a passenger list, s/he may have entered the U.S. via Canada or Mexico (check border crossing lists).
- 7) Don’t stop your search after locating a single record – our ancestors may have made multiple trips between their country of origin and the new country.
- 8) Always look for a second page that might extend from the first, and always review the last pages of a list for notes about passengers.

RESOURCES

- 1) FamilySearch’s online Immigration wiki: familysearch.org/learn/wiki/en/United_States_Emigration_and_Immigration (accessed 01 Dec 2015)
- 2) Lisa Alzo’s online article, “Beyond the Arrival Date: Extracting More from Immigrant Passenger Lists” at www.archives.com/experts/alzo-lisa/immigrant-passenger-lists.html and webinar by the same name at familytreewebinars.com/download.php?webinar_id=89 (subscription required, both accessed 01 Dec 2015)
- 3) Joe Beine’s webpage, “Passenger Lists, Immigration Records and Research Guides” at www.genealogybranches.com/passengerlists.html

RESOURCES (continued)

- 4) Christa Cowan's presentation, "Emigration & Immigration Records Online," presented at Ancestry Day-San Francisco, available online at www.youtube.com/watch?v=lwrBIAIm7qk, and her Ancestry.com presentation, "Tips for Finding Family in Passenger Lists," available online at www.youtube.com/watch?v=L8Vdg5yJHLQ (both accessed 01 Dec 2015)
- 5) Jim W. Faulkinbury's online article, "US Immigration Records, Their History, Content and How to Find Them" at feefhs.org/journal/9/faulkinbury.pdf (accessed 01 Dec 2015)
- 6) Diane L. Richard's online article, "How to Find Immigration Records & Passenger Lists" at www.archives.com/experts/richard-l-diane/how-to-find-immigration-records-passenger-lists-1.html (accessed 01 Dec 2015)
- 7) Marian L. Smith's webpage, "A Guide to Interpreting Passenger List Annotations" at www.JewishGen.org/infofiles/manifests (accessed 01 Dec 2015)
- 8) John Philip Colletta's book, *They Came in Ships: A Guide to Finding Your Immigrant Ancestor's Arrival Record*, 3rd edition, 2002
- 9) Kimberly Powell's book, *The Everything Guide to Online Genealogy: Trace Your Roots, Share Your History and Create an Online Family Tree*, 2014 (specifically Chapter 10 – A Nation of Immigrants)
- 10) Lorie Conway's PBS Home Video, *Forgotten Ellis Island: The Extraordinary Story of America's Immigrant Hospital*, 2008