

Finding Ancestors on Passenger Lists

INTRODUCTION

Passenger lists are a valuable source for documenting an ancestor's immigration. These records can lead you to where an ancestor came from and who they knew in their country of origin. Unfortunately, lists were not kept for all ships and many have been destroyed. The content of passenger lists has changed over time. Understanding a little about the records and the different eras in which they were created will aid you in finding an ancestor's record.

RESEARCH TIPS

It is important to understand who our ancestors were, how they came to America and what to expect from the records that documented their departure and arrival. Leave no stone unturned in the United States. It may be necessary to search every piece of information and every record your ancestor and their descendants left in America. The more details you know about them in America, the better chance you will have of finding the correct passenger list. Prior to searching passenger lists, it is important to know an immigrant's age, family structure, nationality and date of arrival. Creating chronological timelines of events associated with their lives may help narrow the range of immigration years.

Searching the records from the port of departure may provide more information than US entry port passenger lists.

It is helpful to know what information is recorded in specific record groups. Such knowledge should guide your search queries. For instance, if a record group only lists a country of origin, don't enter a city or county.

Entering a name and hitting a search button isn't always good enough. If you can't find the name, try searching with just surname, just given name, nicknames, abbreviations, initials, or use wildcards. How could the name have been misspelled and how might it have been mis-indexed? Think about letters that look similar and might have been misread.

Try searching by names of children or siblings, especially unusual names. Visit the entries for grandparents, aunts, uncles, etc. Remember, we are searching for records, not people. Sometimes, you have to eliminate some results by

finding other information about the individuals-such as their occupation.

Females ancestors may have traveled under their maiden names, even when married, ie., Italians.

Search the web for ethnic equivalents of first names.

Google variations of surnames.

Consider literal translations, ie. Black may have once been Schwarz in German.

Try lengthening or shortening names, ie., Bobinhouse was originally Bobenhauserheide in Germany. More than a few new Americans adopted Americanized names upon arrival or shortly thereafter.

Some passenger list, especially after 1906, have two pages. Always look at the next page.

Passenger lists may hold clues about your immigrant ancestor's past and future. Read every piece of information to extract every detail.

RESOURCES

Printed Resources:

Szucs, Loretto Dennis, and Sandra Hargreaves Luebking, *The Source: A Guidebook to American Genealogy*, 3rd ed. Salt Lake City: Ancestry, 2006. ISBN-13: 978-1593312770. Chapter titled, "Research In Military Records."

Colletta, John P., *They Came In Ships*, 3rd Edition, Nashville, TN: Turner Publishing, 2008. ISBN 0-916489-37-X.

Internet Resources:

www.ancestry.com Click on SEARCH and choose Immigration & Travel then Filter by Passenger Lists

<https://www.familysearch.org/wiki> Search for Passenger Lists

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<https://www.familysearch.org>: Click “Search” at the top. Under “Find a Collection” and type Passenger Lists

<http://www.cyndislist.com/ships>

<http://www.archives.gov/research/immigration>

<http://www.castlegarden.org> Search records of immigrants who passed through America’s first official immigration center from 1855 to 1892.

<https://www.libertyellisfoundation.org/>. Discover where your ancestors emigrated from, who they traveled with, and who was meeting them at their destination.

<https://stevemorse.org/> If you can’t find your ancestor using the Ellis Island website search, try Steve Morse’s handy [searching the Ellis Island Database in one step](#)

<http://www.roots-in-germany.de> Select “Passenger Lists” from the menu for a comprehensive guide to online and print sources, including the Bremen and Hamburg lists.

<http://www.passengerlists.de/> Search departure records from Bremen for 1920-1939—all other lists from Bremen were destroyed in World War II.

<http://www.immigrantships.net> Search over 5,000 ship passenger lists by date, ship name, port of arrival, and by surname

<http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/genealogy/index-e.html> From the Genealogy and Family History page search for Immigration in the upper right search box. Choose the top result “Immigration”

www.dvhh.org/dta/usa/general-research/aliendetentions.htm To find the meaning of abbreviations relating to aliens held for detention

<https://olivetreegenealogy.com/ships/tousa1870-1890.shtml> Go to bottom of page-“Ethnic Groups”