

Identifying Immigrant Ancestors

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Since the mid-1500s millions of immigrants have come to America and what would become the United States. Finding information about the ancestors who made the long journey to this country can add intriguing and revealing elements to your genealogy research. The first step is determining which ancestor immigrated and when.

How can I find out WHEN my ancestor arrived in the United States?

Census information: A good way to start tracing back to the time period when your immigrant ancestor arrived in the United States is checking census record information. By checking census records you can see when the person first appears to be living in the United States. Census records between 1900 and 1930 often show exactly what year your ancestor came over and whether they became naturalized or remained aliens. Censuses earlier than 1900 will sometimes list the town and/or the country that the person immigrated from, but not the year they arrived. Also, finding ages and places of birth for siblings or other relatives listed on the census may give you an idea of a time period the family emigrated to the United States. If a child was born one year in the country of origin, and the next child was born a couple of years later in the U.S., you can use these years as a target date for when the family arrived.

- Use *Ancestry Library Edition* at the Main or any branch library to search census records.
- Use *Heritage Quest* from the library or access it from home to search census records.
- Use the *U.S. Federal Census* on microfilm in Special Collections.

Naturalization records: If you know the state and city where your ancestor settled in the United States, you can try contacting the county court in that area to find out if there is a naturalization record. Naturalization is a process that many (but not all) immigrants use to become a citizen after arriving in the United States (see our research guide on Naturalization Records for more information). The Special Collections Division has Naturalization records available for Summit County.

- *Summit County Naturalization Records 1849-1930* on microfilm in Special Collections Division at the Main Library.
- *Summit County Naturalization Records online from 1850-1991*
<http://www.cpclerk.co.summit.oh.us/welcome.asp>.
- *Special Collections Pathfinder: Naturalization Research.*

Passport records: Sometimes immigrants traveled back and forth to their native country. If this is the case, you may want to locate their passport records. The United States Department of State keeps passport records from 1925 to the present. Those records before 1925 are kept at the National Archives. For information on requesting these records see http://travel.state.gov/passport/services/copies/copies_872.html

Additional Resources:

- *A Genealogist's Guide to Discovering Your Immigrant & Ethnic Ancestors* by Sharon DeBartolo Carmack (2000) **aisle 6A**.
- *They Became Americans; Finding Naturalization Records and Ethnic Origins* by Loretto Dennis Szucs (1998) **aisle 6A**.
- Other books specific to the country of origin may also be available in **aisle 6A**.

Electronic Resources:

- *Ancestry Library Edition:* This database, in addition to containing census information, also has a limited immigration collection.
- *Ellis Island:* This database provides passenger lists of ships that arrived in the New York port at Ellis Island from 1892 to 1954 <http://www.ellisland.org/>.
- *Castle Garden:* Castle Garden was the forerunner of Ellis Island and operated from 1830 until 1892. This database allows you to search passenger records for this New York port <http://www.castlegarden.org/>.

If you still have not found a passenger record for your ancestor, but you know approximately when he or she emigrated, their full name, and what county he or she left, you are ready to search passenger lists. See the Research Guide on Passenger Lists for more information.