

Ship Passenger Lists Fast Facts

Part One: Records Overview

Ship passenger lists are the most popular target for researchers. There are four types of lists that fall under this category:

1. Customs Passenger Lists

Usually prepared by the ship captain and generally provide the following information:

- a. Name of ship/ ship's captain
- b. Port of embarkation
- c. Date of arrival
- d. Port of arrival
- e. Passenger name
- f. Age
- g. Sex
- h. Occupation
- i. Country of origin
- j. Country of intended settlement
- k. Date and circumstances of death when applicable

Most surviving passenger lists are on file at the National Archives. The Family History Library in Salt Lake City is another repository for many of these lists. In addition to the actual lists, there are also copies and abstracts of the original lists. These forms were prepared by the customs collectors and were forwarded quarterly to the State Department. Many collectors made abbreviated copies of the original lists to forward to Washington. In some cases, the information contained in the copies is the same as on the lists, but they can also include information missed on the original lists. You can also access the ***Transcripts From the U.S. State Department*** on file at the National Archives.

2. Immigration Passenger Lists

These are the actual lists of people who passed through the ports of entry based on ships' manifests. The information in these varies greatly depending on the time period, state statutes, and the level of enforcement at the particular port. When properly filled out, the original lists may include some or all of the following information:

- a. Name of ship
- b. Name of ship captain
- c. Port of embarkation and other ports where passengers boarded in route
- d. Date of arrival
- e. Port of arrival
- f. Passenger name
- g. Age
- h. Sex
- i. Occupation
- j. Country of origin
- k. Country of intended settlement

1. Date and circumstances of death when applicable

By 1893, new Federal laws expanded the requested information to include additional requests for information:

- a. Had the passenger ever been to America before. If so, when, where, what reason?
- b. Was the passenger going to join a relative and if so, the relative's name, address, and relationship to the passenger?

By 1906, questions were added concerning race, personal description, specific birthplace, name, and address of the immigrant's nearest relative in the immigrant's home country.

3. Customs Lists Of Aliens

These are of little use to researchers unless the passenger came into the ports of Beverly or Salem, Massachusetts. Because these records mostly pertain to the period between 1798-1800, very few records from this port have survived.

4. Ship Passenger Lists

Ship Passenger Lists were required of the ships captains by governments and included people who migrated as well as crewmembers and those traveling for business or pleasure. Passenger Lists were kept as far back as the 1600s, but very few have survived for the period before 1820.

Records are not uniform because no official guidelines existed, and enforcement was lax until the period after 1870. After 1870, these records became more detailed and included information on family members already living in the United States.

Depending on the time period, and when properly filled out, one may locate some or all of the following information on a ship passenger list page:

- a. Passenger name
- b. Age
- c. Occupation
- d. Date/port of embarkation
- e. Date/port of arrival

Most of the original records are kept at the National Archives and date from about 1820. Researchers should be aware that many passenger lists for the west coast of the U.S. were destroyed by fire.

Most immigrants who came to America were usually part of a set migration pattern followed by their predecessors because they knew it worked. These patterns developed to the point that a study of different geographical areas will shed light on where and how the people came and moved from one town or region to another. People usually traveled in groups, as friends, families, religious bodies, people of the same nationality/language, or groups who had the same background or special interests.

Most of our important early towns and cities were along waterways or big rivers. Rivers are very critical in genealogical research because in previous generations, they served as “highways”. Transportation by water was usually the cheapest, fastest, and safest way for travel between various locations. Our current system of roads and highways began as routes that the Indians and early pioneers traveled. The earliest routes usually ran parallel to waterways. These paths later became the principal means of migration from one region to another. When studying the development of these paths, a very useful tool is the “**Area Key**” which covers a specific county or region.

Part Two: Fast Facts Highlights

1. For most ships entering U.S. ports between 1565 and 1954, some form of ship passenger list was compiled.
2. During the Colonial Era, what constituted a ship passenger list often took a variety of formats and were only mandated for ships arriving from ports located outside the British Empire
3. American colonies were part of the British Empire. There were no formal requirements for ship passenger lists if the departure point was from the British Isles or any port located within the British Empire.
4. Beginning in 1820, the federal government instituted the first mandatory guidelines on requirements for ship passenger lists. However, enforcement was dependant on local and state officials.
5. Due to lax and inconsistent enforcement coupled with growing anti-immigrant feelings the federal government took over formal enforcement of immigration and mandated formal uniform ship passenger list recording procedures in September 27, 1906.
6. While not all passenger lists have survived, most surviving lists will include the following basic information:
 - a. Name of the ship
 - b. Name of the captain
 - c. Port and date of the ship’s departure
 - d. Port and date of arrival in the United States or Canada
 - e. Roster of the passengers with varying degrees of identifying information
7. Amount of identifying information depends on the time period. In general terms the following description will provide a basic idea of what to expect:
 - a. Colonial Era: Passenger lists may be in the form of lists of indentured servants, as part of the ship cargo manifests, or listings within personal papers of wealthy enterprenurs such as William Penn, John Winthrope, George and Leonard Calvert, etc.
 - b. 1820: Federal government established the first basic standards mandating ship passenger lists. The amount of identifying information steadily increased in scope and accuracy. However, enforcement was in the hands of local and state officials. Forms used to records passengers and manifests submitted by ship’s captains often varied by jurisdiction and time period. This lasted until September 27, 1906.

- c. September 27, 1906-1954: Federal government took over formal control of immigration mandating uniform procedures forms, etc.
8. Official U.S. government passenger arrival lists are available from 1820 through 1945 for most of the ports in the United States with customs houses. Those available in the National Archives on microfilm are tabulated in *Immigration and Passenger Arrivals: A Select Catalog of National Archives Microfilms*. This title is shelved in the genealogy collection at **Genealogy Reference 016.929 UNI**.
 - a. The lists are divided into customs passenger lists (original lists, copies, or abstracts)
 - b. Immigration passenger lists (State Department transcripts and lists) with pertinent indexes.
 - c. Microfilm copies are also available for searching at the Family History Library on FamilySearch <http://www.familysearch.org> and the local Family History Centers located throughout the United States. Each year a growing number of actual lists are added to databases such as
 - (1) Ancestry.com <http://www.ancestry.com>
 - (2) Footnote.com <http://footnote.com>
 - d. Selected passenger lists are available at some public and genealogical libraries. The Allen County Public Library in Fort Wayne, Indiana, for example, has a large collection of passenger list microfilms.
 - e. Many surviving manifests, including those from the Colonial era have been scattered among archives, museums, and other historical agencies, but most have been reproduced in published form and are indexed in P. William Filby's *Passenger and Immigration Lists Index*. This set is shelved in our genealogy collection at **Genealogy Reference 929.373 PASSENGER**. Mr. Filby also contributed to another excellent set of books with Ira A. Glazier called *Germans to America*. This set is shelved in our genealogy collection at **Genealogy Reference 929.373 GLAZIER**.
 9. While at least some passenger lists have been indexed for virtually every U.S. port, a large number remain unindexed. As with most governmental generated documents, passenger lists were not intended to be genealogical documents, but rather were a means of monitoring immigrant arrivals.
 10. Historically, up to seven different passenger lists were created and perhaps more for some groups of passengers. Places where these lists were generated and published may include:
 - a. Port of embarkation
 - b. Ports of call along the route
 - c. Ports of arrival
 - d. Newspapers at the port of departure and ports of arrival
 - e. Copy kept with or as part of the ship's manifest
 - f. Notations in the ship's log
 11. Federal control brought about the creation of several types of ship's passenger arrival records. All
 - of them are available for searching, with some restrictions. Two of the best sources for information on ship passenger arrival records are listed below:

Colleta, John. *They Came In Ship's: Guide to Finding Your Immigrant Ancestor's Arrival*

Records. 3rd Edition. Orem, UT: Ancestry Publishing, c2002. **Genealogy and Adult Non-**

Fiction 929.1 COL

Tepper, Michael. *American Passenger Arrival Records: Guide to the Records of Immigrants to*

America Arriving By Sail and Stream. Baltimore, MD: Genealogical Publishing Company, c1993. **Adult Non-Fiction 929.1027 TEP**

12. Ship passenger arrival records have also been added to several databases available through Ancestry.com (commercial subscription database) and the library version Ancestry Library Edition which is available free on the Lee County Library System homepage. Ancestry Library Edition is free to patrons at any branch of the Lee County Library System. No remote access from home is available. A sampling of the databases available through Ancestry are listed below:
 - a. Baltimore Passenger Lists 1820-1897
 - b. Boston Crew and Passengers Lists Index 1820-1943
 - c. Early American Immigrants
 - d. Early Virginia Immigrants 1623-1666
 - e. Founders of New England
 - f. Great Migration Begins Index: Immigrants to New England 1620-1633
 - g. Hamburg Passenger Departure Records
 - h. Bremen Passenger Lists 1920-1939
 - i. New York Passenger Lists Index 1830-1892 (Castle Garden Database)
 - j. New York Passenger Lists Online Index and Images 1820-1957
 - k. Passenger Arrivals in the United States, 1819-20
 - l. Philadelphia Passenger Lists – Index and Images 1800-1945
 - m. Original Lists—Person's of Quality (1600-1700)
 - n. Scandinavian Immigrants in New York 1630-1674
 - o. Wuerttemberg Emigration Index (all 7 volumes)
 - p. Swiss Emigrants in the 18th Century
13. There are a growing number of On-line Passenger Arrival and Research Guides available for research. Some of the most popular include the following:
 - a. Cyndislist – Ship Passenger Lists <http://www.cyndislist.com/ships.htm>
 - b. Ellis Island Database 1892-1924 <http://www.ellisland.org/>
 - c. Firstmoms' Genealogy Resources –Immigrant Ship Passenger Lists <http://khuish.tripod.com/ships.htm>
 - d. Immigrant Ship Transcribers Guild <http://www.immigrantships.net/>
 - e. National Archives Guide to Immigration Records – Ship Passenger Lists and Border Crossings <http://www.archives.gov/genealogy/immigration/passenger-arrival.html>
 - f. Olive Tree Genealogy-Ship Passenger Lists <http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~ote/indexshp.htm>
 - g. Palatines to America Online Immigrant Ancestor Index (German Genealogy Society) <http://www.palam.org/>

- h. Ship's Passenger Lists & Indexes http://www.family-historian.com/sources/passenger_lists/index.html

14. Canadian Ship Passenger Lists and Resources

Canada was always the destination of choice for immigrants who wanted to avoid American ports where documentation was examined in greater detail. Canada was more interested in settlers than asking questions. Surviving early lists of ship passengers are spotty at best. For example, the continuous "official" lists for Quebec City begin in 1865, and those for Halifax, Nova Scotia, and St. John, New Brunswick, begin in 1880 and 1900, respectively. Earlier surviving passenger manifests for these ports are incomplete for most years.

15. Newspapers are one of the better alternative sources for locating lists of passenger arrivals.

- a. Two of the most informative sources of names of steerage passengers in these newspapers are passengers' testimonials and survivor lists.
- (1) Passenger testimonials were usually published in the advertising columns of port newspapers, although some of the unsolicited testimonials were run as news items or as letters to the editor. The testimonial was typically a formal address or statement directed to the captain of the arriving ship from a delegated group of passengers; it expressed appreciation for the amenities of the ship and the competence of its captain and crew.
 - (2) Some testimonials includes such information as the name and line of the ship, the name of the captain, and the ports and dates of departure and arrival. Some testimonials mention the circumstances of departure (such as group emigration) as well as passengers' occupations and previous places of residence. Passengers signing a testimonial sometimes also noted the class of their passage on the ship (cabin, intermediate, steerage, etc.).
 - (3) Publication of testimonials seems to have been seasonal, based on the navigation season for the particular port and the preferred months for emigration, usually during the spring and summer.
 - (4) Survivor lists variously recorded such significant information as ages, relationships, and previous places of residence, although misspellings and other conflicting details occur in press reports after such disasters. It is sometimes necessary to compare different survivor lists for the most definitive information about a particular wreck and passengers. Before the 1860s, a lost or shipwrecked passenger was more likely to be noted in a contemporary newspaper than was a regular steerage passenger who landed safely and without further incident in British North America.
 - (5) Examining newspapers for St. John, New Brunswick, Quebec City, and Montreal from the 1820s to the 1860s yields testimonials and survivor lists can also be used in conjunction with surviving lists.

- (6) One of the best print sources for newspaper records of passengers who went to Canada is Addington, Charles. *Index of Passengers to Canada/British North America*. London, Ontario, Canada, Charles Addington, c2002.
- b. Ancestry.com and Ancestry Library Edition Databases of interest for tracing Canadian immigrants.
- (1) Border Crossing Records: Canada to the United States 1895-1956
 - (2) Border Crossing Records United States to Canada 1908-1935
 - (3) Canadian Passenger Lists 1865-1935
 - (4) National Archives of Canada – Immigrant Records Collection and Immigrant Database 1925-1935

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Ellis Island: An Illustrated History of the Immigrant Experience. New York: Toronto: Maxwell Macmillian International, c1991. **Adult Non-Fiction 325.1 Ell.**

Research in the German Speaking Areas. Salt Lake City, UT: Salt Lake Institute of Genealogy, Larry O. Jensen-Coordinator, Contributors-Barbara Whiting, Roger Minert, Dan Schlyter, c2003. **Genealogy Reference 929.1 SALT**

Tracing Immigrant Origins. Salt Lake City, UT: Salt Lake Institute of Genealogy, Kory Meyerink-Coordinator, Contributors- John P. Colletta, Jeanette K.B. Daniels, Richard W. Dougherty, Gerald Haslam, Larry O. Jensen, Marie Melchiori, John Kitzmiller, c2001. **Genealogy Reference 929.1 SALT**

Carmack, Sharon DeBartolo. *Genealogy Sourcebook.* Los Angeles, CA: Lowell House, c1998. **Adult Non-Fiction 929.1072 CAR**

Coan, Peter M. *Ellis Island Interviews: In Their Own Words.* New York, NY: Facts On File, c1997. **Adult Non-Fiction 304.873 COA.**

- Colletta, John P. *They Came In Ships: A Guide To Finding Your Immigrant Ancestor's Arrival Record.* 3rd Edition. Salt Lake City, UT: Ancestry Publishing, c2003. (2nd edition circulates) **Genealogy Reference 929.1 COL**
- Croom, Emily Anne. *Genealogist's Companion & Sourcebook.* 2nd Edition. Cincinnati, OH: Betterway Books, c2003. **Adult Non-Fiction 929.1 CRO**
- *Unpuzzling Your Past : A Basic Guide To Genealogy.* 4th Edition. Cincinnati, OH: Betterway Books, c2001. **Genealogy Reference 929.1 CRO**
- Drake, Paul & Margaret Grove Driskill. *Genealogy: How To Find Your Ancestors.* Bowie, MD: Heritage Books, c2000. **Adult Non-Fiction 929.1 DRA**
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NOTE: This study guide is meant to serve as an overview or outline for patrons using the genealogy collection at Fort Myers Regional Library. The compiler emphasizes that the information contained in this study guide should not serve as a substitute for taking the time to read one of the books or articles cited in the bibliography, or attend lectures given by the subject specialists cited as authors.

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