

Locating Information About Ships

by **George G. Morgan**

Tracing our ancestors' origins in another country can seem like a daunting task, especially if you've never attempted it before. I teach the "Immigration and Naturalization Research" class for MyFamily.com, which includes lessons about immigration to the U.S., Canada, and Australia. (See today's Fast Fact for a complete list of the classes.)

During the class, we focus on migration patterns from various places in Europe and on different types of documentation that might have been created during different periods in history.

John Philip Colletta's excellent book, *They Came in Ships*, is the best primer concerning passenger arrivals in the U.S. It is essential reading for everyone conducting research into passenger lists. It will give you strong insight into what records and indexes exist.

<<http://www.ellislandrecords.org>>The Ellis Island Database and the large and growing collection of Immigration Records at Ancestry.com may well provide you with links to the exact passenger manifests you need to establish your ancestor's voyage and arrival date. However, not all of the millions of immigrants' records have been digitized and indexed online. In fact, some of the passenger records may either predate the periods for which manifests were required by government offices or may have been lost or destroyed. You may therefore have to use your creative, critical thinking skills to determine other places where you might locate alternate records. You will be looking for substitute records, some of which may be overseas. In any event, you are always looking for more and more information about the ships on which your ancestors sailed.

In "Along Those Lines . . ." this week, I want to share a few interesting ship resources that you may or may not already be using.

The Immigrant Ships Transcribers Guild (ISTG)

"<<http://www.immigrantships.net>>The Immigrant Ships Transcribers Guild" is a volunteer organization that was established in 1998. They have transcribed more than 5,000 ships' passenger lists, citing over a half-million passenger arrivals.

The transcriptions range from the 1600s to the 1900s and can be browsed and searched by ship's name, port of departure, port of arrival, captain's name, and surname.

TheShipsList

<<http://www.theshipslist.com>>TheShipsList provides a tremendous amount of information concerning emigrants and passenger lists for specific ships and ports. More important, however, are the <<http://www.theshipslist.com/ships/lines/index.htm>>Fleet Lists. If your research leads you to the name of the shipping line that owned and/or operated a ship on which your ancestor immigrated, this resource helps you learn more about the company, its history, its disposition, and sometimes even where the company's records ended up. For example, the Hamburg-America Line's webpage provides a brief history, a list of its routes, description of ships' funnel colors, abbreviations used in a variety of shipping documents, and an alphabetical list of every ship in the line, when it was built, years in service and disposition, and tonnage. This is great reference material!

Magellan--The Ships Encyclopedia

Another interesting website is <<http://www.cimorelli.com/cgi-bin/magellanscripts/>>"Magellan - The Ships Encyclopedia". The site is a little funky in its operation, in that it may or may not open an additional browser window when you click on a link. Don't let this put you off, though. This site has an alphabetical listing of ships and biographical information about them. What is interesting about this set of listings is that when you select a ship, the dates of recorded sailings are listed in the left-hand frame of the window. For each sailing, you will see the date of arrival and the port of departure as well as intermediate ports of call on one side of the ocean and the ports of arrival on the other side of the ocean. This can be a real help in determining more about the ship and perhaps even an intermediate stop for your traveling ancestors.

One Hundred Years of Immigrant Ships from Norway

The <<http://www.norwayheritage.com/ships>>"100 Years of Emigrant Ships from Norway" site is one of the most detailed shipping sites I've seen. The site includes a database of emigrant ships searchable by line or by ship. There is another database containing details about shipping lines or agents--and all of the ships they owned/operated, complete with their authorizations and routes. (This can help you rule possible destinations in or out for some time periods.)

One database contains Norwegian ship arrivals around the world between 1870 and 1894, while another is an index of Norwegian ships from 1825 to 1925. (Some years for Bergen departures are missing.) For each ship, the type of vessel and rigging is included, with a link to a description and a graphic image. Finally, another database, which is an ongoing and growing project, contains the names of Norwegian Emigrants from 1825 to 1925.

Online German Immigration Lists, Databases, and Indexes

Effective German migration research requires an understanding of the history of the area(s)

where your ancestors may have been originally. There are many records that can be researched, and the <http://home.att.net/%7Ewee-monster/index.html> GermanRoots site provides a strong collection of resources. Here you will find many instructional guides to help your research in Germany, plus links to a number of online databases, including those at Ancestry.com.

"Link to Your Roots" Database, Hamburg, Germany

The City of Hamburg, Germany, has produced a http://international.hamburg.de/index/1,2709,JGdlbz0zJG9rPTE4MzM4JHVrPSQ_,00.html dynamic and exciting website, accessible in many languages, including English. It specifically recognizes the more than 5 million people who emigrated through that city's port to the U.S. from Germany and all over Eastern Europe between 1850 and 1934. The site is located at: http://fhh1.hamburg.de/fhh/behoerden/staatsarchiv/link_to_your_roots/english/index.htm
Link to Your Roots databank [database]

This website is available in other languages, and it provides access to the German State Archives so that you can conduct a search for persons in the historical Hamburg passenger lists. While the Hamburg lists span 1850 to 1934, the databank presently only contains those records for the years 1890 through 1905. This is a fee-based site. You may charge your searches directly to a credit card, or, for an additional charge, pay by check by sending a printout of the person's records you want, along with your check, for processing and return mailing of the records.

Mariners Website

You may also be interested in information about mariners, merchant marines, and different navies of the world. The <http://www.mariners-1.co.uk> Mariners website will prove helpful in learning more about these ships and about your mariner ancestor's life at sea.

Look for Shipping Companies Records

When looking for the shipping companies' actual records, you will probably find that what is on the manifest at the U.S. end is all that there was at the originating port of embarkation, but there may also be other incidental records. These might include correspondence, booking slips, reservation sheets, receipt books and ledgers, and other materials. You never can tell. Let me suggest the following approach:

Use your favorite search engine and construct a search that includes the name of the shipping line in quotes (to make it an exact phrase) and another set of words, shipping records, in quotes, such as shown below:

"Great Western Steamship Company", or "shipping records."

This will present you with lots of responses that may help you determine the trail of ownership of the company. In addition, you might try some other searches to gain access to information about specific shipping companies or vessels such as:

"Swedish American Line" records "ship Pitts," "HMS Pitts," or "H.M.S. Pitts."

Don't overlook the fact that some or all records of a specific shipping company or a vessel or the captains' logs may have found their way into a maritime museum. You might consider using a search such as the following:

"Cunard Steamship Company" records "maritime museum."

Finally, consider the possibility that general references to emigration records may be included on Web pages where the names of countries, provinces, and specific towns' names may also be included. The use of both the place of origin and a destination port may narrow your search too much, but sometimes it also is worth a try. One of the following samples of structured searches might be helpful:

"emigration records" France (or the country or province name), "emigration records" Bordeaux, "emigration," "Le Havre," or "New Orleans."

All of these are possibilities, and you need to be creative and methodical with the types of searches you perform. Look for possibilities for the companies' records having been handed down to successive owners, thus you may have to research the genealogy of the shipping line. In addition, don't overlook <http://www.aemi.dk> The Association of European Migration Institutions website. Click on the link labeled Addresses and, at that page, click on the link labeled List of A.E.M.I. Members for a list of excellent resources, including their postal, Web, and e-mail addresses, and telephone numbers. These can prove to be invaluable reference and contact resources.

Also, if you think you know where your ancestors came from, don't overlook researching in the libraries and archives in that country or specific area. A great research reference is the <http://www.uidaho.edu/special-collections/Other.Repositories.html> University of Idaho's Repositories of Primary Sources Web page and I know you will get lost browsing and searching in this one.

Another of my favorite references for libraries online is

[LibrarySpot.com](http://www.libraryspot.com).

While there, don't miss the [Libraries Online](http://www.libraryspot.com/libraries) page that provides access to thousands of libraries' online catalogs.

Summary

Don't let all these resources intimidate you. Instead, consider how very much really is out there on the Internet to get you started. As always, use the materials you find on the Internet as a starting point to locate copies of the actual materials for your own review.

Now, adjust that telescope and set sail to locate YOUR immigrant ancestors!

Happy Sailing!

George

George's new book, *How to Do Everything with Your Genealogy*, has been released by McGraw-Hill/Osborne Media and is selling like hotcakes! You can order it at online bookstores or request a copy at your favorite bookstore today. George is president and a proud member of the International Society of Family History Writers and Editors. Visit the ISFHWE website at <http://www.rootsweb.com/~cgc/> . Visit George's Web site at <http://ahaseminars.com/atl> for information about speaking engagements.

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