

## Tips for Finding Your Immigrant Ancestors, Part 2

In my last column we discussed where to begin researching immigrant ancestors and how to use census and naturalization records. This time we will continue the discussion with an explanation of passenger lists, colonial records, and the various printed sources you will want to reference in your pursuit of your immigrant ancestors.

**Passenger Lists** Customs passenger lists (ships' passenger lists) for the United States started in 1820 and many are indexed. Immigration passenger lists, also known as ship manifests, began in 1883 and give more detailed information.

Original passenger lists from the National Archives have been microfilmed and are arranged by port of arrival, and then chronologically. The largest ports of immigration were New York City, Boston, Baltimore, Philadelphia, and New Orleans.

Although there is no index for the port of New York for the period 1847 through 1896, many of the earliest New York City immigrant lists have been published by Genealogical Publishing Company and Scholarly Resources. Especially helpful are the published lists *Germans to America* and *The Famine Immigrants* (lists of Irish immigrants).

After 1820, the peak years of immigration to America were the decade of the 1880s, and also 1905 through 1915.

Ellis Island opened its doors in 1892 and served as the main gateway into America from that year until 1954. Over 12 million people entered America through Ellis Island. Passenger lists were kept and they are indexed. It is estimated that about 40 percent of Americans can trace their ancestry to this immigration station. In the year 1907 alone over one million immigrants arrived.

Not all immigrants were happy with their new home. One Italian immigrant wrote home, "I came to America because I heard the streets were paved with gold. When I got here, I found out three things. First, the streets weren't paved with gold; second, they weren't paved at all; and third, I was expected to pave them" ("*Ellis Island: Realizing the American Dream*," *Town & Country*). To learn more about Ellis Island, see the [Statue of Liberty-Ellis Island Foundation Web page](#).

**Colonial Records** Many colonial passenger and immigration lists have been published in books and periodicals. It is estimated that over one million immigrants came to America before 1820. The largest index of early American published immigration records is the multi-volume *Passenger and Immigration Lists Index*, edited by P. William Filby. These volumes may be found at major libraries and they are available on compact disc (Brøøderbund CD #354). Here you can quickly search for over 2 million immigrants and find details regarding their arrival in America, and sometimes naturalization and oaths of allegiance. A list of sources indexed is included (showing article and book titles).

Names and other details of many early immigrants to America may be found in printed sources. A selected bibliography of immigration titles follows:

Anderson, Robert Charles. *The Great Migration Begins: Immigrants to New England, 1620-*. Boston: New England Historic Genealogical Society, 1995-.

Bentley, Elizabeth P. Passenger Arrivals at the Port of New York, 1820-. Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co., 1999-.

Coldham, Peter Wilson. The Complete Book of Emigrants, 1607-1775. 4 vols. Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co., 1987-.

Coleman, Terry. Going to America. Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co., 1987.

Colletta, John Philip. They Came in Ships. 2nd ed. Salt Lake City: Ancestry, 1998.

Dobson, David. Directory of Scottish Settlers in North America, 1625-1825. Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co., 1984-.

English Origins of New England Families from the New England Historical and Genealogical Register. 6 vols. Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co., 1984-85.

Family History Library. Tracing Immigrant Origins. Salt Lake City: Family History Library, 1992.

Filby, P. William, ed. Passenger and Immigration Lists Index. Detroit: Gale Research, 1981-.

Glazier, Ira A., ed. Migration from the Russian Empire: Lists of Passengers Arriving at the Port of New York, 1875-. Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co., 1995-.

\_\_\_\_\_ and Michael Tepper, eds. The Famine Immigrants: Lists of Irish Immigrants Arriving at the Port of New York, 1846- Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co., 1983-.

\_\_\_\_\_ and P. William Filby, eds. Germans to America: Lists of Passengers Arriving at U.S. Ports, 1850-. Wilmington, Delaware: Scholarly Resources, 1988-.

\_\_\_\_\_ and P. William Filby, eds. italians to America: Lists of Passengers Arriving at U.S. Ports, 1880-1899. Wilmington, Del.: Scholarly Resources, 1992 .

National Archives and Records Administration. Immigration Records. Online.  
<http://www.nara.gov/genealogy/immigration/immigrat.html>.

Tepper, Michael. American Passenger Arrival Records. Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co., 1993.

\_\_\_\_\_, ed. Passenger Arrivals at the Port of Baltimore, 1820-1834. Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co., 1982.