Getting Started in Jewish Genealogy

Class 2: Finding Origins in American Records

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Naturalization Records

1. Exact birthplace…sometimes!

2. Connect naturalization to arrival

3. Clarify personal name variations

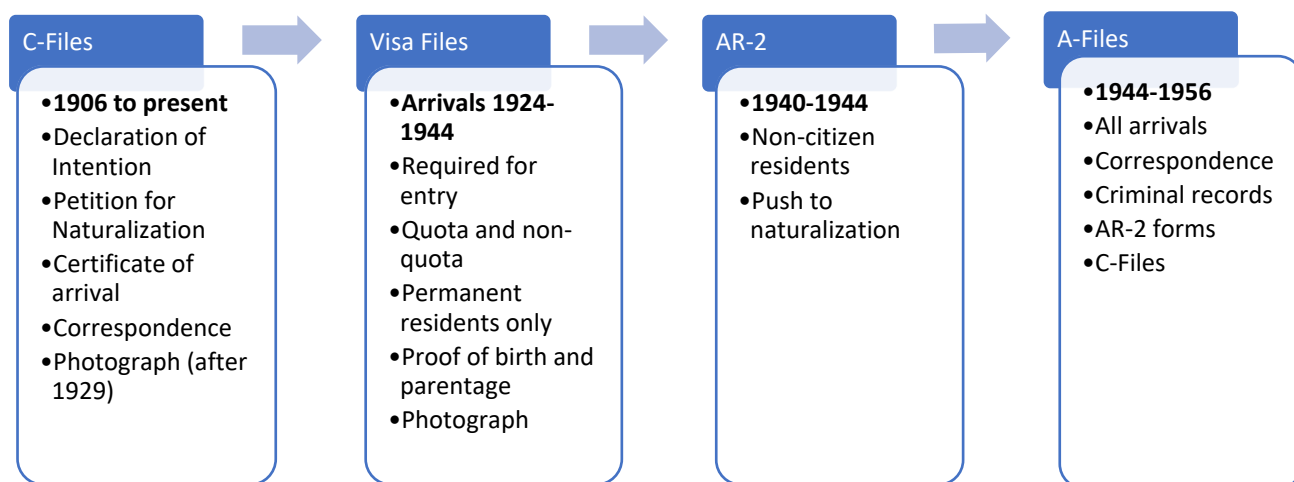> 1. Naturalization (C-Files)
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> 2. Visa Files
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> 3. A-Files
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> 4. Alien Registration
>
> 5. Passports

What are the best sources to locate an ancestor's birthplace?

1. Naturalizations: More accurate and reliable after 1906. Court of jurisdiction and the United States Citizenship and Immigration Service (USCIS).

    - State and federal records for specific localities indexed at major genealogical websites.

    - Court records available through the FamilySearch.org catalog.

2. Visa files: proof of origins required.

3. A-Files: groups multiple immigration records into a single file. Highly likely to contain an exact birthplace.

4. Alien Registration Forms: Very few survive from WWI, but the WWII-era records include the specific birthplace.

6. Passports: vary in detail, but often include the specific birthplace and naturalization information.

What if my ancestor was not naturalized, or naturalized before 1906?

1. Research extended relatives. Perhaps their naturalization or passenger record will include specific information for their shared origins.

2. Accumulate as many records as possible: military, vital, gravestone, newspapers.

3. Expect variations in reported birthplaces and names. There was no standardized convention for anglicizing Yiddish or Hebrew names (not every Moshe became a Morris!).

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C-Files		Visa Files		AR-2		A-Files
•**1906 to present** •Declaration of Intention •Petition for Naturalization •Certificate of arrival •Correspondence •Photograph (after 1929)	→	•**Arrivals 1924-1944** •Required for entry •Quota and non-quota •Permanent residents only •Proof of birth and parentage •Photograph	→	•**1940-1944** •Non-citizen residents •Push to naturalization	→	•**1944-1956** •All arrivals •Correspondence •Criminal records •AR-2 forms •C-Files

Progression of records collected by the Immigration and Naturalization Service now in the possession of the United States Citizenship and Immigration Service.

Helpful links:

The USCIS Genealogy Program for ordering records from before 1951: https://www.uscis.gov/records/genealogy.

FOIA requests through the United States Department of State: https://foia.state.gov/.

The NARA guide to immigration records in their holdings: https://www.archives.gov/research/immigration.

Gazetteers:

Meyer's (German Empire): https://s.meyersgaz.org/search

Kartenmeister (Kingdom of Prussia): http://www.kartenmeister.com/preview/databaseuwe.asp

Geographic Dictionary of the Kingdom of Poland: http://dir.icm.edu.pl/Slownik_geograficzny/

Gemeindelexikon (Austrian Empire): http://wiki-de.genealogy.net/Gemeindelexikon_der_im_Reichsrate_vertretenen_Königreiche_und_Länder

JewishGen Town Finder (all localities): https://www.jewishgen.org/Communities/Search.asp

Gesher Galicia (Austrian-controlled Galicia): https://www.geshergalicia.org/galician-town-locator/

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