

# Navigating Passenger Lists: Arrivals to the United States

## *Class 1: Foundations of Passenger List Research*

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### **Immigration to the U.S.**

There were several waves of immigration to the United States, each featuring different primary players and motivations. The number of immigrant arrivals each year generally increased until the outbreak of World War I. It is estimated that approximately 35 million immigrants arrived between the colonial period and 1924.

<b>Overview of Immigration to the U.S. to 1924</b>				
<i>Time Period</i>	<i>Primarily From</i>	<i>Total Number</i>	<i>Motivations</i>	<i>Notes</i>
1607-1640	British Isles	100,000	Religious persecution, establish new settlements	Great Migration
1640-1783	British Isles, Holland, Germany, Africa	750,000	Religious persecution, opportunity to own land, Industrial Revolution, slave labor	Colonial period
1783-1815	British Isles, Holland, Germany, Scandinavia, Africa	250,000	Opportunity to own land, Industrial Revolution, escape from war, slave labor	Early national period
1815-1860	British Isles, Holland, Germany, Scandinavia, Switzerland	5 million	Opportunity to own land, escape from war, escape from famine	Antebellum period
1860-1890	British Isles, Holland, Germany, Scandinavia, Switzerland	10 million	Opportunity to own land, promise of a better life	
1890-1924	Austria-Hungary, Italy, Russia, Greece, Turkey	15 million	Promise of jobs, higher wages	Peak years

After 1924, immigration to the U.S. slowed. The visa system was introduced in 1924 and quotas based on nationality were imposed. These policies lead to a major drop in immigration numbers. Immigration slowed again during World War II, and after the war immigration was centered on humanitarian relief, family reunification, bringing in seasonal workers, and recruiting skilled workers.

Passenger lists, passenger manifests, or ship's manifests are key resources for genealogists, helping to identify the names, ages, occupations and, of course, places of origin of our ancestors. These lists contain the names of individuals traveling aboard a particular vessel. The information on the lists was typically collected by the shipping agency at the port of departure (not the port of arrival) and later turned over to a U.S. government agency.

Generally, the earliest complete passenger lists date to 1820 and the information collected varies based on the time period, as described below. Separate lists were kept for crew members.

Early on, passengers traveled aboard cargo ships. It was not until the 1830s that purpose-built passenger ships were used to transport immigrants. Many immigrants traveled in steerage, or 3<sup>rd</sup> class, which was the cheapest ticket. Passengers with more funds at their disposal could travel as cabin passengers, in 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> class.

Wind-power (sailing ships) dominated until the mid-1860s. The transition from sail to steam was slow, with hybrid ships being introduced before fully steam-powered vessels became popular. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, a transatlantic journey could take as many as two to three months. By the end of the century, the journey was reduced to about a week.

## Laws Relating to Passenger Lists

As the number of immigrants arriving in the U.S. grew, the government imposed a series of laws aimed at tracking these new arrivals. The first of these federal laws was passed in 1819, though the port of Philadelphia did require that lists of passengers from Continental Europe be kept from 1727 to 1808. The legislation summarized below impacted the creation of passenger lists. These are not the only immigration laws passed throughout the course of history, only those most relevant to the creation and maintenance of passenger lists.

- Steerage Act of 1819: Required ship captains to report names, ages, sex, and occupations of passengers to U.S. Customs and limited the number of passengers based on ship tonnage
- Carriage of Passengers Act of 1835: Regulated conditions aboard the ship and continued the obligations set forth in the Act of 1819, but added that the part of the vessel in which the passenger had traveled also be recorded
- Passenger Act of 1882: required that “the name, age, sex, calling, and native country of each emigrant passenger, or passengers other than cabin passengers, and their intended destination or location, and the number of pieces of baggage belonging to each passenger, and also the location of the compartment or space occupied by each of such passengers during the voyage” be reported to Customs
- Immigration Act of 1891: Created the Office of the Superintendent of Immigration and transferred control to the federal government; formalized inspection of passengers
- Immigration Act of 1893: Revised inspection of passengers and expanded passenger information collection by shipmasters
- Immigration Act of 1903: Expanded passenger information collection and excluded four “inadmissible classes” from entering the country

## Researching the Ship

Moving beyond the passenger list, researching the vessel itself can help provide context for your immigrant ancestor's life. Note the details about the vessel given at the top of the passenger list (for early lists) or on the shipmaster's affidavit (for later lists) such as the captain's name, the port(s) of departure, and port(s) of arrival. This information can be used in addition to other primary sources to identify details about the ship's construction, owners, size, and typical travel route.

Shipping registers, such as those created by Lloyd's, were used by underwriters to assess risk for insuring ships. They contain details about the ship's construction (origin and materials), owner, home port, tonnage, and dimensions. While Lloyd's of London is perhaps the best known, there were also German, American, Scandinavian, and other national shipping registers. See "Shipping Registers & Guides to Shipping Registers" below for relevant resources.

Shipping or maritime news columns in newspapers can also provide clues about vessels and immigrant voyages. These short articles might provide details about when a ship left port or where it was last seen. Notices of ships arriving in port might name the cabin passengers, give the total number of passengers on board, list the number of births and deaths at sea, or give the total length of the journey.

Shipping companies and agents also placed advertisements giving dates of departure, ticket prices, and the location of the ship piers.

Shipping news columns can also be used to research maritime disasters, as partial passenger lists of wrecked ships were often published.

Try Newspapers.com (\$), GenealogyBank.com (\$), NewspaperArchive.com (\$), ChroniclingAmerica.LOC.gov, and FultonHistory.com to locate relevant shipping news articles.

You may come across nautical terms in reading the shipping news. Wikipedia has a comprehensive glossary of nautical terms at [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Glossary\\_of\\_nautical\\_terms\\_\(A-L\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Glossary_of_nautical_terms_(A-L)).

## Immigration & Passenger List History Resources

"Aboard a Packet," *Smithsonian National Museum of American History*,

<https://americanhistory.si.edu/on-the-water/maritime-nation/enterprise-water/aboard-packet>

Anne C. Sibert, *Tracing immigrants through the Port of New York: early national period to 1924*, (New York: New York Genealogical & Biographical Society, 2020).

"Days of the Old Packet," *New York Daily Times*, 13 Dec 1891, transcribed at

<https://www.theshipslist.com/accounts/packets.shtml>

"Era of Restriction," *U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services*, <https://www.uscis.gov/about-us/our-history/overview-of-agency-history/era-of-restriction>

Eugene W. Smith, *Passenger Ships of the World, Past and Present*, (Boston: George H. Dean Company, 1963). Available online at HathiTrust.

Eugene W. Smith, *Trans-Atlantic Passenger Ships, Past and Present*, (Boston: George H. Dean Company, 1947). Available online at HathiTrust.

Eugene W. Smith, *Trans-Pacific Passenger Ships, and Appendix to Trans-Atlantic Passenger Ships, Past and Present*, (Boston: George H. Dean Company, 1953). Available online at HathiTrust.

Gjenvick-Gjønvik Archives, <https://www.ggarchives.com/> [contains articles on the immigrant experience and ephemera such as steamship line brochures, menus, tickets, and passenger contracts]

“Immigrant Arrivals: A Guide To Published Sources,” *Library of Congress*, [https://www.loc.gov/rr/genealogy/bib\\_guid/immigrant/lists.html](https://www.loc.gov/rr/genealogy/bib_guid/immigrant/lists.html)

“Immigration, Emigration & Migration,” *Cyndi’s List*, <https://www.cyndislist.com/immigration/>

“Immigration to the United States 1933-1941,” *U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum*, <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/immigration-to-the-united-states-1933-41>

John Philip Coletta, *They Came in Ships: A Guide to Finding Your Immigrant Ancestor's Arrival Record*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., (Orem, Utah: Ancestry, 2002).

“Organizational Timeline,” *U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services*, <https://www.uscis.gov/about-us/our-history/organizational-timeline>

“Researching U.S. Passenger Lists,” *Genealogical Forum of Oregon*, <https://gfo.org/learn/researching-us-passenger-lists.html>

Rhonda R. McClure, *The Portable Genealogist: Immigration to the U.S.*, (Boston: NEHGS, 2013). Available for purchase at <https://shop.americanancestors.org/>.

“U.S. Arrivals – Customs Passenger Lists,” *NorwayHeritage*, <https://www.norwayheritage.com/US-passenger-arrivals.htm>

## Shipping Registers & Guides to Shipping Registers

Danmarks Skibsliste, *Museet for Søfart*, <https://mfs.dk/ms-videnscenter/arkiv/registre/danmarks-skibsliste/> [includes links to Danish shipping registers]

Find A Ship, *NorwayHeritage*, [http://www.norwayheritage.com/query\\_s.asp](http://www.norwayheritage.com/query_s.asp)

Germanischer Lloyd, *Internationales Register. 1870*, (Rostock: G.B. Leopold’s Universitäts-Buchhandlung, 1870). Available online at Google Books.

Germanischer Lloyd, *Internationales Register. 1872*, (Rostock: Germanischer Lloyd, 1872). Available online at Google Books.

Germanischer Lloyd, *Internationales Register. 1874*, (Berlin: Germanischer Lloyd, 1874). Available online at Google Books.

“Interpreting the Register Books,” *Lloyd’s Register Foundation Heritage & Education Centre*, <https://hec.lrfoundation.org.uk/archive-library/interpreting-the-register-books>

List of International Shipping Registers Held at the Library of Congress, <https://guides.loc.gov/ship-registers/lists/international>

Lloyd’s Register of Ships Online, *Lloyd’s Register Foundation Heritage & Education Centre*, <https://hec.lrfoundation.org.uk/archive-library/lloyds-register-of-ships-online> [includes links to shipping registers from 1764 to 1994]

“Register of vessels arriving at the Port of New York from foreign ports, 1789-1919,” NARA RG 36, <https://www.familysearch.org/search/catalog/115379>

“Ship Descriptions,” *The Ships List*, <https://www.theshipslist.com/ships/descriptions/index.htm>

Shipping Registers & Databases, *Books, Boxes, & Boats: Maritime & Historical Research Service*, <https://www.maritimearchives.co.uk/ships.html> [links to shipping registers, wreck lists, and shipbuilders, mostly UK, Australia, and Canada]

Skeppsslista 1837-1908, *Riksarkivet*, <http://ddss.nu/ships/shipsSearch> [Swedish shipping register database]

The Original American Lloyd’s Register of American and Foreign Shipping, <https://onlinebooks.library.upenn.edu/webbin/serial?id=amlloyds> [covers 1857-1883]

“Top Tips for Using the Lloyd’s Register Book,” *Lloyd’s Register Foundation Heritage & Education Centre*, 11 June 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vkDHaGAoh2s>

## Ship Images

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“Immigration & Steamships,” *Mystic Seaport Museum*,  
<https://research.mysticseaport.org/exhibits/immigration/>

Lindsay Sena, “Where to Find Immigrant Ship Images,” *Family Tree Magazine*,  
<https://familytreemagazine.com/records/immigration/quick-guide-immigrant-ship-images/>

Michael J. Anuta, *Ships of Our Ancestors*, reprint, (Baltimore, Md.: Genealogical Publishing Co., 1993).

New York Port, Ship Images, 1851-1891, *Ancestry.com*,  
<https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/8644/>

Passenger Ships and Images, *Ancestry.com*, <https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/8944/>

Ship Images, *The Ships List*, <https://www.theshipslist.com/pictures/index.htm>

“Ships: Navigating for Images at the Library of Congress,” Library of Congress,  
<https://guides.loc.gov/ship-images?loclr=blogpic>

William H. Miller, *Pictorial Encyclopedia of Ocean Liners, 1860-1994: 417 Photographs*, (New York: Dover Publications, 1995). Digital loan available at Archive.org.