

# Navigating Passenger Lists: Arrivals to the United States

## *20<sup>th</sup> Century Migration Records: Passenger Lists and More*

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### **Immigrant Restriction**

The previously mentioned Dillingham Commission included not only William Paul Dillingham who was best known for his restriction of immigrants from certain countries, and a number of other restrictionists. For instance, Henry Cabot Lodge was the public voice of the Immigration Restriction League. The Immigration Restriction League was founded in Boston, Massachusetts in 1894 by three Boston Brahmin Harvard alumni: Charles Warren, Robert DeCourcy Ward and Prescott F. Hall. They believed that immigrants from southern and eastern Europe were ethnically inferior to Anglo-Saxons. In 1906, Prescott F. Hall wrote a book entitled *Immigration and Its Effects Upon the United States* in which he compared the Northwestern Europeans to Southeastern Europeans, with records showing the deficiencies in those coming from southeastern Europe.

In addition to the biases being vocalized about the southeastern Europeans, there were also limitations being placed on Chinese immigration in part to protect them from labor abuse and in part because of the numbers of Asians who had already arrived.

### **Chinese Exclusion Acts**

The first act to exclude Chinese immigration was in 1882, but subsequent acts in 1884, 1888, 1892 and 1902 expanded the exclusions. Ultimately in the Immigration Act of 1917, there was identified an Asiatic Barred Zone that included much more than just China. These acts forced many immigrants from China before 1917 to create fictitious relationships to those already in the United States. These were known as “paper sons.” Because these immigrants knew they would be heavily interrogated upon their arrival they spent their ship crossing studying complete family trees with information about hometowns and more.

### **Literacy Tests**

While included in Congressional bills beginning in 1891, a literacy test was not actually approved until 1917. Though The Immigration Act of 1917 was vetoed by President Woodrow Wilson, it was overridden by Congress and became a law February 5, 1917. In addition to the previously mentioned Asiatic Barred Zone, which was also part of this act, it required all immigrants over the age of 16 to prove they were literate. One of the tests included reading a passage from the Bible in their native language.



## Quotas

The Immigration Act of 1921, passed on May 19, set an annual quota for each nationality group at three percent of the number of foreign-born persons of that national origin as enumerated in the 1910 census. Certain classes of alien were exempted from this quota. It still acknowledged the Asiatic Barred Zone, denying those immigrants entry.

The National Quota Act of 1924 further reduced the number of immigrants who could gain entry. It limited the countries to two percent of the number of foreign-born persons of each national origin as enumerated in the 1890 census. There was a lower limit of 100 individuals. It was heavily weighted to limit the southern and eastern Europeans from gaining entry. The “national origins” system became fully operational in 1929. It capped the total immigration outside of the Western Hemisphere to 150,000 immigrants, which averaged out to five northwestern Europeans for every one southeastern European. Great Britain and Northern Ireland were allotted 65,721 immigration slots. Germany had 25,957. Meanwhile Greece had 307 slots per annum and Portugal had 440.

It was while under these quotas in the 1930s that immigration saw struggles. Those in the United States didn’t want any new arrivals as those in America were already struggling to find ways to make ends meet. Meanwhile, in Germany the Nazi Party was taking control and many immigrants were seeking refuge out of that country—especially Jews. Some refugees were required to wait two or more years to get a visa to immigrate to the United States.

## World War II and After

Once World War II began things slowed considerably. Many Europeans had been conscripted into their own country’s military. Ships that had previously carried passengers to the United States were painted grey and carried troops to Europe and crossing the Atlantic was not a safe passage with the German U-boats in wait.

While World War II continued for America, and the dislike of the Japanese was rampant, the Immigration Act of 1943, passed December 17, repeated all prior Chinese Exclusion Acts. It also allowed the Chinese to become naturalized citizens.

After the war, the United States realized they had to address the issue of service men who had married while overseas. The War Brides Act was passed December 28, 1945. Though there was still a quota system in place for immigrants, it established that brides and children of veterans carried non-quota status as immigrants and established that World War II began December 7, 1941 and ceased “upon the termination of hostilities as declared by the President or by a joint resolution of Congress.” In addition, race could not bar an alien spouse from entry.

An additional act was passed June 25, 1948, known as the Displaced Persons Act, in which was created a non-quota status for certain displaced persons as a result of World War II. Some 400,000 people were admitted to the United States over four years under this act.

The Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1952, passed June 27, is the act from which all present-day immigration and naturalization laws stem. Like the Act of 1917, this one was vetoed by the then President, Harry S. Truman, but it was overridden. It had 407 sections under four titles addressing all things related to immigration and naturalization. Truman's issues with the 1952 Act had to do with the inequality of immigrants – where once again those of Northwestern countries were deemed to be better citizens than those from southeastern Europe. Likewise, he did not approve of the power given to the Attorney General in determining what immigrants could come into the country.

Also known as the Walter-McCarran Act, it established a preference system that determined which ethnic groups were desirable, placing great importance on labor qualifications. It defined three types of immigrants:

- Immigrants with special skills or relatives who were U.S. Citizens
- Average immigrants (number not to exceed 270,00)
- Refugees

The Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1965, also known as the Hart-Cellar Act, was passed October 4, 1965. It eliminated the national-origins quotas that began in 1924. It established a new immigration policy based on reuniting immigrant families as well as attracting skilled labor to the U.S.

The policies put into effect under the Hart-Cellar Act would dramatically change the demographic makeup of the American population. In the three decades that followed its passage, more than 18 million legal immigrants entered America. That was more than three times the number admitted during the previous 30 years.

## Passenger Lists

Though passenger lists, or manifests, have existed since 1820, it was during the 20<sup>th</sup> Century that the lists expanded, asking more questions and also including marks that could hold clues to additional records to aid family historians.

Years	Information Provided		
1903-1907	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Name</li> <li>• Age, in years and months</li> <li>• Sex</li> <li>• Marital status</li> <li>• Calling/occupation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If they have a ticket to final destination</li> <li>• Who paid for passage</li> <li>• How much money in possession</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If ever in prison or an asylum</li> <li>• If a polygamist or an anarchist</li> <li>• Whether under contract (express or implied)</li> </ul>

Years	Information Provided		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ability to read/write</li> <li>• Nationality</li> <li>• Race/People</li> <li>• Last residence</li> <li>• Final destination</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If they had been in the U.S. before (if so, when and where)</li> <li>• If joining a relative or friend (who and where)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Health, both mental and physical</li> <li>• If deformed or crippled (nature of or cause and where)</li> </ul>
1907-1917 (two-page form)	<i>Same as previous, plus:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Head-tax status</li> <li>• Name and address of the nearest relative or friend in country from which the alien came</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If they had at least \$50 (if not, how much)</li> <li>• Height, in feet and inches</li> <li>• Complexion</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Color of hair and eyes</li> <li>• Identifying marks</li> <li>• Place of birth, country and city</li> </ul>
1917-1924	<i>Same as previous, plus:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Read what language (or grounds for exemption)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Purpose of coming to U.S. (coming temporarily to labor, if so how long; intending to become a U.S. citizen)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Whether previously deported within one year</li> </ul>
1924-1948	<i>Same as previous plus:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Immigration Visa, Passport Vis, or Reentry Permit Number</li> <li>• Issued (place and date)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Data concerning verification of landing, etc. (used by U.S. Government officials)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Whether person believes or advocates overthrow by force or violence of the U.S. Government</li> </ul>
1948-1957	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Name, age, sex</li> <li>• Marital status</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Travel Document number and Nationality</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pieces of baggage</li> <li>• Head tax collected</li> </ul>

Blank passenger list forms from 1882 to 1948 for abstracting information can be found on the National Archives web site (<https://www.archives.gov/research/genealogy/charts-forms>).

You may also find a lot of cryptic handwritten markings in the various columns of the passenger lists. These markings offer insight in things like detention, going before a board of special inquiry, applying for naturalization, proving literacy, and more. A detailed description of these notations can be found at “Manifest Markings: A Guide to Interpreting Passenger Lists Annotations” by Marian L. Smith (former Historian of the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service) and is online (<https://www.jewishgen.org/infofiles/manifests/>).

## Records of Investigation

For those individuals who did have to go before a Board of Special Inquiry, it is possible that additional records about them exist. Housed at the National Archives in Washington, D.C. are 7,886 feet of Hollinger boxes full of folders of subject and policy files – many of which were generated when an immigrant arrived at a port and was forced to undergo additional investigation and referred to as Record Group 85, Entry 9 Files that date predominantly from 1906 to 1957. There are also early 1900 correspondence files that are known as Entry 7 Files.

While there is a subject index to the Subject and policy Files, 1893-1957, which was microfilmed and has now been digitized and is available on Ancestry.com, there is no guarantee that your ancestor's name was listed under the subject in question. Many individuals who may have been grouped together by ethnicity or charge may be listed and have detailed interrogations in a file, but their name does not appear on the cards that make up the Subject Index.

Among the records that may be found in a particular case file include:

- Detention cards
- Medical certificate or testimony
- Board of Special Inquiry transcripts
- Correspondence between the port and Washington, D.C.
- Bills of expenses of lodging and feeding the detainee
- Bonds
- Verification of landing
- Deportation Warrants

As immigration acts expanded excludable classes, attempts were made to hold the shipping lines responsible for carrying any passenger who was found to be defective in some manner. For those with health issues, certificates of good health were often required before boarding a ship back in Europe and then daily health inspections were supposed to be undertaken during the voyage. Such was not always the case, and those who immigrated before such laws were put in place may have been held up in an attempt to prevent individuals with contagious diseases from entering the country. Other health issues included deformities, insanity and idiocy.

Because the men who were largely in charge of creating the new laws saw immigrants as generally less desirable and especially single women arriving alone as being corruptible, morality and a lack thereof often resulted in investigations. Those found to be suffering from *moral turpitude* were usually barred from entering the United States. Of note, men were seldom held to the same standard as the women, even if they were directly involved in adultery with the said woman, for example.

In addition, the fear that young children might be forced into child labor or immigrants who already had a job were somehow taking that job away from a qualified American led to the passing of the Alien Contract Labor Law in 1885. It forbade most immigrants from already having a job lined up when they arrived. However, they had to prove they were healthy and fit enough to be employable. There were certain exceptions to this law—especially if the individual had skills that could not be found among the population of the United States.

The “likely to become a public charge” exclusion was such an ambiguous definition of undesirability that it became a catchall method of detaining anyone that an inspector simply didn’t like the looks of. In addition to obvious illnesses and age, deformity, lack of mental faculties, gender (read women) were all reasons a person was suspected of being unable to get a job if they were allowed into the country. Things such as psoriasis, and how it made a person’s arm look, or a small limp could result in an immigrant being detained as likely to become a public charge. This exclusion was also often used if a new order had come down from Washington’s General-Commissioner of Immigration and the inspectors weren’t quite sure just who it applied to. They would detain them and then ask if the person fit the new requirements.

## **Other Records**

Eventually additional records were generated either as a result of how the individuals were entering the country or as a result of the immigration acts passed, most especially the Quota Act of 1924, which required visas to be applied for back in the country of origin.

## **Border Crossings**

In 1895 the United States decided it was important to establish points of entry from Canada and that the U.S. Government should be aware of who was entering the United States from Canada. This was in part the result of Asians who were barred from coming into the United States via the shipping ports. As a result, beginning in 1895, individuals coming from Canada into the United States were recorded on either border manifests—which largely resemble passenger manifests—or they were recorded on border cards.

A similar situation on the southern border between the United States and Mexico was established in 1903, though the primary document used at this border was the border entry card.

While earlier attempts with the use of mounted inspectors operating out of El Paso tried to police the southern border, it really wasn’t until the passage of the National Origins Act (“Quota Act”) of 1924 that the U.S. Border Patrol was officially formed. They were assigned to prevent illegal entries along both the northern and southern borders of the United States.

## **Visas**

Perhaps the most important paper trail result of the Quota Act of 1924 was the creation of visas. These records exist from 1 July 1924 to 31 March 1944 and were issued in the country of origin for those who were planning to permanently move to the United States. The visa usually included:

- Name of immigrant
- Proof of birth, including names of parents
- Residence five years preceding
- Medical or personal affidavit

- Photograph

Refugees, though perhaps able to get more visas, were still required to apply for the visa. In some situations, this could have resulted in their waiting for many years for the opportunity to immigrate.

## Airline Arrivals

Eventually, people were taking more airplanes to get to places quicker, which included immigrants coming to the United States. For most international airports this resulted in manifests with just names and identifying whether the individuals were U.S. citizens returning or aliens arriving. Such manifests are not very helpful, in such taking researchers back to pre-1820 lists of arrivals.

Those arriving by airplane in Pennsylvania are similar to the border crossing cards. Information includes places and dates of birth, when and where they got their visa and more. These are the exceptions to the rule though.

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