

Immigration Records (as part of Vivid-Pix's "Round Tuit" Webinar Series)



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About Your Presenter:

Rich Venezia lives in Pittsburgh and is a leading expert in twentieth-century immigration research and records, especially underutilized record sources and federal records. He was a member of PBS' *Genealogy Roadshow* research team for two seasons and he also consulted on *Follow Your Past* (The Travel Channel). He researches family histories for private clients, TV shows, attorneys, and other genealogical research firms. He also conducts research for those with Italian and Irish ancestry, and makes annual research trips to Europe. Additionally, he assists clients with dual citizenship for both Ireland and Italy. He received his Certificate in Genealogical Research from Boston University in 2015. He lectures nationally, and spoke about "How to Grow Empathy From Uncovering Your Roots" at TEDx Pittsburgh 2017. He coordinated the #RecordsNotRevenue campaign in late 2019 and early 2020, which received international press and garnered him the Shirley M. Barnes Records Access Award from the Massachusetts Genealogical Council.

Passenger Arrivals – Early Records

- Pre-1820 passenger arrivals are few and far-between; there is no guarantee a record is extant.
- See *Passenger and Immigration Lists Index*, a 15-volume series by P. William Filby and Mary Keyser Meyer; indexes over 4.5 million names found in over 2,500 sources for early arrivals; searchable on *Ancestry.com* at <https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/pili354/>
- Another excellent resource for very early Pilgrims (read: 1602 – 1638) is at <https://www.packrat-pro.com/ships/shiplist.htm>; it was created by Anne Stevens.

Ship Manifests – A Timeline

- First legislation providing for sustained reporting of passenger arrivals – Steerage Act of 1819: Required passenger lists be furnished to the Collector of Customs, to then be sent to the Secretary of State quarterly
 - In effect from 1 January 1820
- 1820 to ca. 1891: What we think of as passenger lists were really customs lists; usually just country of origin listed; the columns did not contain much information; these manifests existed to regulate customs; their function was NOT to regulate immigrants
- 1891 Immigration Act changed the function of ship manifests; US Immigration Service was now to receive ship manifests and they would be used to regulate immigrants
- 1891 forward: Place of last residence listed
- 1893 forward: Who immigrant was going to join in the U. S. listed
- 1903 forward: "Race or people" listed
- 1906 forward: Exact place of birth listed
- 1907 forward: Closest relative or friend left behind in home country listed
- 1917 forward: Whether able to read or write, and in what language listed

Ship Manifests – Tips

- Women of certain ethnicities (Italian, Spanish, Chinese, French, Dutch) often went by their maiden names...though there were always exceptions to the rule
 - Remember this if wives followed their husbands later on – any children accompanying her might be listed under her maiden surname
- Look at the address each passenger on the list is going to in the U. S. – oftentimes, immigrants traveled together to the same area, apartment block, or family
- Ship manifests are many pages – don't limit your search to the page on which the immigrant of interest is located to find possible connections
- See <https://www.jewishgen.org/InfoFiles/Manifests/> for all things related to ship manifest notations – it is essential reading

Naturalization

- Pre-1906: Records generally only include country of origin.
- Pre-1906, naturalizations could have occurred at almost any local county court of record – Common Pleas Court, Mayor's Court, Probate Court, etc.
- Copies of records for all naturalizations that occurred from 27 September 1906 are held with USCIS – either the Genealogy Program (pre-April 1956) (see <https://www.uscis.gov/genealogy>) or via FOIA (after 1 April 1956) (see <https://www.uscis.gov/about-us/freedom-information-and-privacy-act-foia>).
- Determine which courts conducted naturalizations in your area of interest and where those records are held – ask local historical societies, libraries, the local genealogical society, the county court house (usually Clerk of Courts or Prothonotary), the local historian, etc.
- *FamilySearch (FS)* has many naturalization records digitized; search the county under “Catalog” and look for entries under “Naturalization and Citizenship”
- See <http://media.americanjewisharchives.org/docs/wilskeZack.pdf>
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- Women gained citizenship from U. S. citizen husbands 10 February 1855 – 22 September 1922. At no point did a man gain automatic (derivative) citizenship from a U. S. citizen wife.
- Alien children under 21 naturalized with father's naturalization from 1790 – 1941 (but things get complicated after 1934).
- Children and wives may not be noted on earlier naturalization records, EVEN IF they gained citizenship. Only starting in 1906 were they listed on naturalization paperwork (in most instances).

Recommended Reading

Colletta, John Philip. *They Came in Ships: Finding Your Immigrant Ancestor's Arrival Record*, 3rd ed. Provo, Utah: Ancestry Publishing, 2002.

Schaefer, Christina K. *Guide to Naturalization Records of the United States*. Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Company, 1997. [This is a must-own.]

U.S. National Archives & Records Administration. “Immigration Records (Ship Passenger Arrival Records).” www.archives.gov/research/immigration/passenger-arrival.html

All URLs valid as of 24 April 2020.