

# Major U.S. Immigration Ports

Plus tips for locating your ancestors in arrival records

Our immigrant ancestors' journey to America is an important part of the family story. They probably entered through any of the more than seventy federal immigrant stations located along the country's shores, the most famous of which was New York. In this guide we've gathered interesting details you might not know about the major U.S. immigration ports of New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Boston, Galveston, New Orleans, and San Francisco, as well as tips for finding your ancestor's arrival record.

## The Port of New York

### The Largest U.S. Port

Of the 5,400,000 people who arrived in the United States between 1820 and 1860, more than two-thirds entered at New York. By the 1850s, New York was receiving more than three-quarters of the national total of immigrants, and by the 1890s more than four-fifths. Although New York was the largest and most important portal, more than seventy other federal immigrant stations were located along the shores of the United States.



Immigration Station, Ellis Island, New York, 1900. From the Library of Congress Photo Collection, 1840-2000

### Quarantine

Prior to July 1855, there was no immigrant processing station at New York. Passengers and crew were inspected onboard by a health official and if any were infected with an infectious disease, all passengers and crew were sent to the "Quarantine" on Staten Island. Built in 1799, the Quarantine was a compound of hospitals surrounded by six-foot high wall in Tompkinsville.

From the start, the residents of Staten Island resented the Quarantine, blaming it for disease in the surrounding communities. In September of 1858, a mob burned down the hospitals.

Following the blaze, the quarantine station was relocated to a large ship, the *Florence Nightengale*, which was anchored in the Atlantic Ocean. In 1866, the quarantine station was again relocated to Hoffman and Swinburne Islands, where it remained until moving to Ellis Island in 1920.

In 1847, the Emigrant Refuge and Hospital on Ward's Island was built as a place of refuge for immigrants who were ill. It quickly grew to become the largest hospital complex in the world at that time. It was established by the Board of Commissioners of Emigration, who would in 1855 go on to establish the Emigrant Landing Depot at Castle Garden to aid immigrants upon arrival in New York.

### Castle Garden

In 1855, Castle Garden (sometimes called by its earlier name, Castle Clinton), an old fort on the lower tip of Manhattan, was designated as an immigrant station under the supervision of the State of New York. When a new federal law was passed in 1882, Castle Garden continued to operate under contract to the United States government. By 1890, however, the facilities at

# Major U.S. Immigration Ports

## Plus tips for locating your ancestors in arrival records

Castle Garden had long since proved to be inadequate for the ever-increasing number of immigrant arrivals.

### Ellis Island

After a government survey of potential locations, Ellis Island was the site chosen for an entirely new United States immigration station. Several Manhattan sites were previously rejected because earlier newcomers had been routinely and ruthlessly exploited as they left Castle Garden. On an island, the immigrants could be screened, protected, and filtered slowly into their new culture. From April 1890 through December 1891, a barge office near the U.S. Customs House at the foot of Manhattan served as the immigration station and on 1 January 1892, the Ellis Island Immigration Station was opened.

The life of the first station on Ellis Island was short. All the pine-frame buildings burned to the ground in a disastrous fire on 15 June 1897. Congress immediately appropriated funds to replace the structures with fireproof buildings. During the next two and a half years, immigrants were once again processed at the barge office on Manhattan. The new buildings were brick and ironwork structures with limestone trimmings, and the station reopened 17 December 1900. The main building was notable for its cupola-style towers and spacious second-floor Registry Room.

### Immigration Quotas

Soon after the 1924 Immigration Act was adopted, traffic through Ellis Island subsided to a trickle. A final revision of the "national origins" quota system went into effect in 1929. The maximum number of all admissions to the United States was reduced to only 150,000 people annually and was a deliberate attempt to set permanently the ethnic and racial mix of America.

These immigration restrictions dealt a deathblow to the importance of Ellis Island. In its last years of operation, a portion of the island was used as a Coast Guard station and later as a detention center for enemy aliens. In November 1954, the last immigrant and the last detainee left, and the immigration center was declared surplus property by the General Services Administration (GSA).

City of New York, 1856. (Castle Garden at the bottom left.) Sketched and drawn on stone by C. Parsons (Currier & Ives). From the U.S. Map Collection, 1513-1990 on Ancestry.



# Major U.S. Immigration Ports

Plus tips for locating your ancestors in arrival records

## The Port of Philadelphia

### Geography

Located more than 100 miles from the Atlantic Ocean, Philadelphia would seem an unlikely candidate as a major immigration port of entry, but 1.3 million immigrants passed through the port. The route took immigrants around Cape May at the foot of New Jersey, into Delaware Bay and up the Delaware River to Philadelphia, adding more than 200 miles to the journey from Europe. And the route wasn't without its hazards. The Delaware River often froze over during winter, limiting early immigration to warmer months.



Lazaretto Quarantine Station, Delaware River, Tincum Township, Delaware County, Pennsylvania, 1933. From the Library of Congress Photo Collection, 1840-2000

### The Immigrants

During the 1700s, there was an influx of German and Scots-Irish immigrants, many of whom arrived as indentured servants or "redemptioners" and stayed in the city to work off the cost of the passage. Between 1847 and 1854, the port of Philadelphia ranked 4th in terms of immigration, receiving 4.4 percent of immigrants arriving in America.

By 1870, more than 25 percent of the city's 750,000 residents were foreign, with 100,000 Irish and 50,000 Germans comprising the majority of the immigrant population and English and Scottish immigrants accounting for much of the remainder.

Beginning in the 1880s, Philadelphia's immigrant population became more diverse, with significant populations of Italians, Hungarians, Poles, and Russian and Eastern European Jews (particularly following the pogroms that were carried out in the early 1880s and 1900s) entering the mix. While earlier immigration groups were spread out throughout the city and surrounding areas, these newer groups tended to settle in ethnic enclaves.

Between 1880 and 1900, Philadelphia was the port of entry for 5.6 percent of immigrants, but between 1910 and the advent of World War I in 1914 that dropped to 4.8 percent. The quotas set in 1924 put the brakes on immigration, particularly from southern and eastern European countries and in the post-World War I era, less than 1 percent of the nation's immigrants passed through the Philadelphia's port.

### The Lazaretto

Spurred by the 1793 yellow fever epidemic in Philadelphia, in 1799 the Lazaretto quarantine station was built 8 miles from the city. Ships were required to stop there for health inspections. The hospital had the capacity to house 500 patients. Infected clothing and bags could be disinfected by steam.

In 1884 a federal quarantine station was also set up on Reedy Island whereby passengers received screenings from both state and federal authorities. The duplicate screenings were ended in 1913 when a centralized inspection station opened at Marcus Hook, 20 miles from Philadelphia.

# Major U.S. Immigration Ports

Plus tips for locating your ancestors in arrival records

Despite the multiple inspections, Philadelphia didn't turn away many immigrants. According to *Forgotten Doors: The Other Ports of Entry to the United States*, by M. Mark Stolarik, "From 1901 to 1902, for example, of 17,175 arrivals in Philadelphia, though many were detained for questioning or investigation, only 107 were debarred from entering the country." Only 26 of these were due to disease.

## Immigration Stations

In the 50 years following 1873, in which the Red Star and American steamship lines began regular service, more than 1 million immigrants arrived at Philadelphia immigrant stations where they went through Customs. The Washington Avenue station where those two lines docked was especially busy. The Pennsylvania Railroad built an immigrant station on the wharves to receive the immigrants. In 1896 the immigrant station there was expanded to accommodate the increase in traffic, and other stations were built at piers on Fitzwater Street, Callowhill, and Vine Street. Just before World War I, a new immigrant station was being planned, but with the drop in immigration during the war, construction was halted. The Washington Avenue station was demolished in 1915, and from that point on passengers were processed on board ships.

## Immigrants through Other Ports

Keep in mind that immigrants arriving in Philadelphia often moved on immediately after their arrival at the immigration stations/railroad depots. On the other side of the coin, immigrants living in Philadelphia often arrived through other ports, particularly the busier Port of New York, which was only 90 miles away, but also through Baltimore which is roughly 100 miles southwest.



Bird's-eye view of Philadelphia, c. 1875. From the Library of Congress Photo Collection, 1840-2000

# Major U.S. Immigration Ports

Plus tips for locating your ancestors in arrival records

## The Port of Baltimore

### Colonial Immigration

The first immigrants arrived in Maryland in 1634 from England and Ireland on board the *Ark* and the *Dove*. Slaves from Africa were brought in great numbers to work the tobacco fields, and by the mid-1700s, they represented more than a quarter of Maryland's population.

### Privateering

During the Revolutionary War and the War of 1812, Baltimore was a bustling port for privateers. The fledgling U.S. government needed naval power and turned to the private sector. Letters of marque and reprisal (government licenses) authorized private ships to prey on merchant vessels sailing under enemy flags, in what amounted to legal piracy. Captured ships were brought to port, where they were condemned in the Admiralty Court and sold at auction. After taxes and court fees, the proceeds were split among the privateers at a pre-determined rate.

### A Transportation Network Is Born

During the 19th century, a robust transportation network began taking shape in Baltimore. By 1818, the National Road (also called Cumberland Road) linked Cumberland, Maryland, with Wheeling, Virginia (now West Virginia). Baltimore completed a series of turnpikes in 1824 that ultimately connected the Chesapeake Bay to the Ohio River. The Baltimore & Ohio Railroad (B&O) began serving passengers in the late 1820s and by 1852 had reached Wheeling as well. These inland transportation routes, coupled with Baltimore's geographic location as the westernmost seaport on the East Coast, made Baltimore an attractive port of entry for immigrants seeking a route to the U.S. interior.

### The Immigrants

Immigration waves through Baltimore reflected that of other eastern U.S. port cities, like Philadelphia, Boston, and New York. Irish famine immigrants began arriving in the late 1840s and continued to stream in during the ensuing decades. Even larger numbers of German immigrants were also arriving around this time. Other ethnic groups followed, although in smaller numbers.

In 1867, immigration jumped when the North German Lloyd Steamship line entered into an agreement with the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad, allowing immigrants to purchase one ticket that would take them across the ocean to Baltimore and inland by train. Ships laden with tobacco, lumber, and cotton goods from Baltimore's textile industries arrived in Bremerhaven and returned with European immigrants and goods. That year more than 10,000 people passed through the port, more than doubling the 4,000 immigrants of the previous year.

### The Immigrant Experience

In 1868 immigrants began arriving at the new B&O piers at Locust Point. Immigration inspections required for steerage passengers were conducted on board the ships as they made their way into Chesapeake Bay. When they docked at the pier, immigrants could go directly to the B&O trains that would take them on the next leg of their journey.



Immigrant receiving piers, Locust Point, Baltimore, 1892. From the Library of Congress Photo Collection, 1840-2000

# Major U.S. Immigration Ports

Plus tips for locating your ancestors in arrival records

For those who had to wait for trains, the Immigration Station contracted with Mrs. Augusta Koether, who ran a large boarding house. She was paid 75 cents a day for each immigrant who stayed with her. According to *Forgotten Doors: The Other Ports of Entry to the United States*, her boarding house was a haven for immigrants for close to half a century.

**POLK'S MEDICAL REGISTER OF NORTH AMERICA**  
 Contains the names and addresses of over 140,000 Physicians, school practiced, date and college of graduation; lists of Medical Colleges, Hospitals Sanitariums, Societies, Boards of Medical Examiners, Laws, Mineral Springs, etc.  
 R. L. Polk & Co., Publishers, Detroit.

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**KOE BALTIMORE DIRECTORY 1913 KOH 1217**

<p>Koestner Jos, ctr, h 415 n Eden                  Koestner Selma, grocer, 1214 Cooksie                  Koethe Chas, propr Alderney Lunch Room, h 329 w German                  Koethe Eug G, clk, 2018 n Fulton av  <b>KOETHE H D &amp; SON (Henry D and Harry A Koethe), Plumbers and Gasfitters, 18-20 s Liberty, Phone St Paul 3295</b>                  Koethe Harry A (Henry D Koethe &amp; Son), h Severna pk                  Koethe Oscar, clk, 209 n Gay                  Koethe Reht A, tinner, 2018 n Fulton av                  Koether Augusta, in charge U S Immigrant Detention House, 107 Beachdale rd, R P                  Koether Chas G, 401 n Milton av                  Koether David, shoemkr, 401 n Milton av                  Koether Emil A, student, 107 Beechdale rd, R P                  Koether F Wm, brklyr, 401 n Milton av                  Koether Geo E A, shoemkr, h 401 n Milton av                  Koethes Wm C, baker, 209 n Gay, h do                  Koetteritzsch Minnie M, grocer, 801 Rutland av, h do</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>WM. E. WOOD CO.</b></p> <p><b>STEAM.. WATER.. FURNACE } HEATING</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Cooking Appliances, Repairs</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>18 N. HOWARD ST.</b></p> <hr/> <p>Kohlbauer Louis H, dairy, 2530 e Madison                  Kohlbus Chas G, baker, h 727 s Glover                  Kohlbus Jos R, toolkpr, h 2632 Hampden                  Kohlbus Louis, lab, h 1346 Towson                  Kohlenberg Geo R, clk, 1817 w Lanvale                  Kohlenberg Wm, lab, 131 w Randall                  Kohlenstein Amanda Mrs, 511 Franklin ter                  Kohlenstein Edith, cashr, 511 Franklin ter                  Kohlenstein Walter, ctr, 511 Franklin ter                  Kohlenstine Bros (Louis and Max), furn, 203 n Pine</p>
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Wood Alcohol, Den...

Immigration through Baltimore peaked at about 40,000 per year when World War I stopped the flow of immigration, but not before close to 2 million immigrants had passed through Baltimore's port.

Search for your ancestors in [Baltimore Passenger Lists](#).



Waterfront of Baltimore, Maryland, 1904. From U.S. Panoramic Photos, 1851-1991

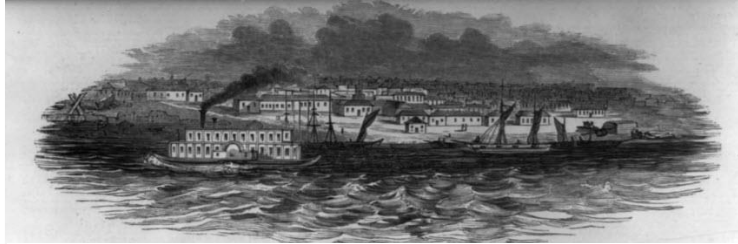
# Major U.S. Immigration Ports

Plus tips for locating your ancestors in arrival records

## The Port of Galveston

### Mexican Trading Post

Galveston has a rich and colorful history, with its roots in a pirate settlement that Jean Lafitte called home between 1817 and 1821. The Port of Galveston was established as a small trading post and customs house in 1825, when Texas was still part of Mexico. It was an important commercial center and by 1835 it was the home port for the Texas Navy.



Port of Galveston, 1845. From the Library of Congress, Photo Collection, 1840-2000

### The Immigrants

Beginning in the 1830s and 1840s, groups of Swedish and Norwegian immigrants began arriving in Texas, with many entering via Galveston. During this same period, large groups of Germans were also settling in Texas, predominately in the Galveston/Houston areas, with some moving on to San Antonio. Competing with Galveston as ports of entry were Matagorda, Velasco, Aransas, Corpus Christi, and Indianola, but European immigration via Galveston continued to increase.

Between 1907 and 1914, Jews escaping the Russian pogroms were encouraged to immigrate through Galveston because there were fears that an influx of Jewish immigrants through the more popular Atlantic ports would result in a wave of anti-Semitism. It is estimated that 10,000 Jewish immigrants passed through Galveston during this period.

### Steamship Service

In 1837, Charles Morgan began steamship service between New Orleans and Galveston. His shipping companies would go on to dominate trading throughout the Gulf of Mexico.

### Civil War Blockade

In 1861, the Union Navy began a blockade of Galveston, and after a brief battle in 1862, Confederate troops evacuated Galveston for more defensible positions on the mainland. Union occupation was short-lived, as Confederate forces retook Galveston on 1 January 1863 and it remained under Confederate control for the remainder of the war.

With the blockade of Mobile beginning in August 1864, Galveston became a hotspot for blockade runners supplying Confederate troops, as it was one of the few open Confederate ports in the Gulf.

### 1900 Hurricane

Following the Civil War, Galveston grew as an important center of trade in the Gulf, but on 8 September 1900, a devastating hurricane struck the island, washing away structures and killing an estimated 6,000-8,000 people. Following the storm, a seawall was built to protect the island from future storms, and efforts were put in place to raise the city; these efforts which were met with varying degrees of success.

# Major U.S. Immigration Ports

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## The Port of New Orleans

### Return Trip Immigration

The city of New Orleans quickly rose to prominence as a commercial center as exports like cotton and other agricultural products from the South left for trade centers in Europe. On the return trips captains offered a cheaper passage than some other routes. Although the trip was longer than the journey to some other ports, the price was right for many Irish, German, and French immigrants.

In the early 1800s, steamboat travel enabled travel upstream from New Orleans through the lower Mississippi River Valley, and this provided a convenient route to the fertile lands of the Mississippi Valley. The steamships brought produce from the interior to New Orleans for export and return trips northward brought many of the immigrants who had arrived through New Orleans into the American heartland on the next leg of their journey.

### Peak Years

An estimated 550,000 immigrants passed through the Port of New Orleans between 1820 and 1860, making it the second-leading port of entry in the United States by 1837. Of those 550,000 immigrants around 350,000 of them arrived between 1847 and 1857. In fact throughout the antebellum period, New Orleans drew more immigrants than Boston, Philadelphia, or Baltimore.

### Civil War Years and After

With the blockade of Confederate ports during the Civil War, immigration through New Orleans was halted and never regained its momentum due to the rapid expansion of railroads that made travel from Eastern ports more appealing. Also, at this point more and more shipping companies were turning to the larger steamships that couldn't reliably get into the port of New Orleans because of sandbars that often blocked the port. In 1879 a set of parallel dikes, or jetties, designed by James Buchanan Eads narrowed the mouth of the river, which cut a deeper trench that allowed for the passage of larger ships.

This helped the port regain its prominence as a world class trade center, but immigration never rebounded to its pre-Civil War levels. It did receive a small portion of the wave of Eastern Europeans that began arriving in the U.S. in the 1880s, as well as a number of Italians (most notably from Sicily) and other Mediterranean immigrants. Due to its proximity to Cuban and Caribbean shipping lanes, New Orleans also drew a large number of Spanish and Latin American immigrants arriving in the U.S.



State of Louisiana Board of Commissioners of the Port of New Orleans. From U.S., Historical Postcards



# Major U.S. Immigration Ports

Plus tips for locating your ancestors in arrival records

## A Seasonal Route

Travel through New Orleans wasn't without its risks. Yellow fever and malaria were recurring visitors between the months of May and November. Immigrants with little or no immunity to these tropical diseases were especially at risk, so travel guides recommended that immigrants avoid arriving in the city during those months.

In 1853, the city was hit with an epidemic of yellow fever that sickened 40 percent of the population, and it's estimated that around 8,000 people succumbed to the disease that year. Wealthier residents often fled the city during the summer months to avoid the disease.

## Looser Restrictions

Because of the lucrative nature of the port, the business community wanted an open, deregulated port. This made it an attractive port of entry for those who might be detained at stricter ports. For example, after the Chinese Exclusion Acts of the 1880s, some Asians still found their way into the U.S. through New Orleans due to the looser enforcement of immigration laws. The loose restrictions were also attractive to those with physical challenges that might jeopardize entry through other ports.



The city of New Orleans, and the Mississippi River, c. 1885. From the Library of Congress Photo Collection, 1840-2000

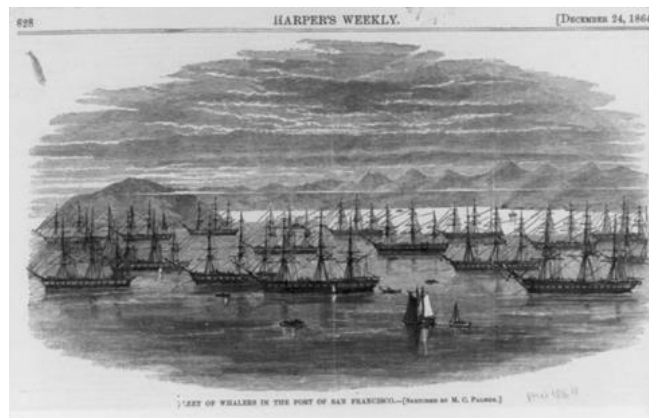
# Major U.S. Immigration Ports

Plus tips for locating your ancestors in arrival records

## The Port of San Francisco

### Overland Immigration

With the advantage of a natural harbor, it's interesting that some of the most notable immigration to San Francisco came overland. In 1776, Juan Bautista de Anza led an expedition of settlers to the first presidio in San Francisco, via an overland route from Sonora, Mexico. Trappers and hunters began arriving in the 1820s, also overland, but the most significant wave of immigrants into San Francisco via overland routes began with the discovery of gold.



Fleet of whalers in the port of San Francisco, c. 1864. From the Library of Congress Photo Collection, 1840-2000

### Gold Rush Immigration Sea Routes

In 1848, the discovery of gold at Sutter's Mill in California triggered a migration of more than 300,000 people to the gold fields. While a few made their fortunes through side ventures, most worked very hard for very little. Those who went faced dangers from disease, accidents, and violence.

With so many people flocking to California in search of gold, every available means of transportation was employed. For those coming from the east coast of the U.S. or Europe, some chose to make the trip by sea, rather than face the long trek across the United States. But the voyage by sea had its perils as well. The sea voyage could mean a trip around Cape Horn, where ships were tossed in turbulent, windy, and iceberg-filled waters, and were often blown near Antarctica.



The trip could take up to eight months and onboard conditions were horrid. Food spoiled quickly in the equatorial heat, and worms and rodents got into supplies. Skilled captains might be able to shorten the trip by traveling the Straits of Magellan, a sea passage around the tip of South America, but this, too, was considered a dangerous trip. The narrowness of the passage at certain points made it a difficult route to navigate.

A shorter trip took passengers to Panama, where they embarked on canoes to navigate the Chagres River. From there, things were more difficult, as the remainder of the passage to the Pacific meant a 50-mile hike through the Panamanian jungle where gold seekers were at risk of contracting cholera, malaria, and yellow fever. Those who survived this leg of the journey often arrived in Panama City to find a shortage of ships. This meant that they would have to wait, sometimes for weeks, to obtain passage on a northbound ship to California.

# Major U.S. Immigration Ports

Plus tips for locating your ancestors in arrival records

## European Immigration

The Gold Rush came at the tail end of the Irish potato famine, which had caused a mass exodus of poor Irish, many of whom arrived on American shores and made their way west. By the 1880s, the Irish made up a third of the population of San Francisco.

The Revolutions of 1848 also prompted emigration from France, the German and Italian states, the Austrian empire, and Poland. In France, a lottery was held to help California-bound emigrants. In the years between 1846 and 1851, more French citizens left for the U.S. than at any other period during the 19th century, and it's estimated that around 30,000 French immigrants found their way to California.

Some northern Italians were among the Argonauts who arrived in San Francisco for the Gold Rush, and by the 1890s a larger wave of southern Italians, Sicilians in particular, had made their way to San Francisco, where many of them worked in the fishing industry, establishing Fisherman's Wharf.

The large waves of migration stirred up of nativism, despite the fact that some of the "natives" had been there for only a few years and were immigrants themselves. But despite prejudice against some European immigrants, it didn't come close to the backlash that the Chinese faced.

## Chinese Immigration

The first influx of immigrants into California from China came around the time of the Gold Rush. By 1852 the Chinese population in California was estimated to be at around 25,000, but the Chinese weren't welcomed in a land where the gold fields weren't producing the riches expected and where the industrious Chinese were seen as a threat to those competing for jobs.

By 1880, the Chinese community, centered in Chinatown, represented 10 percent of the population of San Francisco. Fed by the economic depression of the 1870s, anti-Chinese sentiment reached a fever pitch. In 1882, the United States passed several new laws regarding immigration, the first of which was the Chinese Exclusion Act. The legislation blocked the immigration of Chinese "skilled and unskilled laborers and Chinese employed in mining" and allowed entry only to non-laborers who could be certified by the Chinese government qualified to immigrate. It also required Chinese immigrants who had left the U.S. to obtain certification in order to reenter.

## Angel Island

An immigration station on Angel Island opened its doors in January 1910 in an effort to enforce the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. It is estimated that more than 1 million persons coming to and leaving the U.S. were processed through Angel Island, including 175,000 Chinese immigrants and 150,000 Japanese immigrants, with some being held there for weeks or even months in terrible conditions.



Immigration station, Angel Island, Cal., 1915, from U.S. Panoramic Photos, 1851-1991

# Major U.S. Immigration Ports

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## The Port of Boston

### Not that Popular Early On

Despite deep colonial roots, for most years Boston was not the port of choice for immigrants. Even the more distant port of New Orleans drew more immigration from Europe between 1828 and 1848. Initially the port thrived as a commercial shipping hub for industry. In 1840 the Cunard line began operating a route out of Liverpool to Halifax and Boston and immigration through the port began to climb slowly.



The City of Boston, Parsons & Atwater Del., Currier & Ives, 1873

### Many Went to Canada First

Coastal travel between Canada's Maritime Provinces brought immigration from Canada, and also from Ireland. Passage from the UK was cheaper to Canada than to U.S. ports, and in the early 19th century, emigration from the British Isles to Canada was encouraged and at times subsidized. Many Irish immigrants took this route and then made their way to Boston (and other U.S. destinations) via coastal shipping routes.

### Many Potato Famine Immigrants Chose Boston... and Stayed

Immigration through the port surged with the Irish potato famine. Between 1847 and 1854, Boston began drawing a minimum of 20,000 immigrants per year thanks to subsidized immigration from Britain via the Cunard Line. Even with British subsidies, the \$17 to \$20 fares left most with nothing once they arrived. With no money to travel further most of the Irish immigrants remained in Boston rather than moving on. By 1850, three quarters of the foreign-born residents of the city were Irish.

### Eastern Europeans Joined the Mix in the Late 19th Century

Although the numbers fluctuated over the years, the Irish continued to dominate immigration to Boston through the latter part of the 19th century, as jobs in textile mills, shipyards, and ironworks represented better opportunities than were available in Ireland. In the 1880s, 1890s, and into the 20th century they were joined by growing numbers of immigrants from Eastern and Mediterranean Europe. Jewish immigrants fleeing pogroms and poor living conditions in Eastern Europe also contributed to the surge.

### The Processing Station Didn't Process Everyone

In 1845, a customs house was constructed on Long Wharf at the terminus of State Street and this facility was used as an immigration processing station until the early 20th century. Only immigrants who needed to be detained due to paperwork or further examination were held at the station. Most were processed on the docks. By the early 20th century, a new facility was needed as the Long Wharf facility was deemed a fire hazard.

The East Boston Immigration Station, often referred to as "Boston's Ellis Island," opened in 1920 and operated until 1954. As with the previous station on Long Wharf, most immigrants were processed on the docks, but those requiring further examination were brought to the immigration facility. During World War II, it was also used as a temporary detention center for German, Italian, and Japanese immigrants before they were moved on to other detention centers.

# Major U.S. Immigration Ports

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## Finding Your Ancestor's Arrival

Ancestry has the largest collection of [passenger arrival records](#) online, with lists from all of the major U.S. ports and many smaller ports. Here are some tips for searching them.

### Estimate the Arrival Date

The date of immigration can be found in a number of records, including some census records (the [U.S. Federal Censuses for 1900-1930](#) all ask for year of immigration), death records ("How long in the U.S.?" was often recorded on death certificates), obituaries, and many other records and home sources. Often a combination of resources can help pin down immigration dates. Using a combination of birth dates and birth locations, particularly among siblings in the family that immigrated, it is often possible to narrow the arrival date to within a few years. Include your estimated immigration date in your search on Ancestry to narrow your results to a smaller window. You can add +/- 1, 2, 5, or 10 years to give yourself a little wiggle room for rough estimates.

The screenshot shows the Ancestry search interface with the following details:

- Search** button and  Match all terms exactly
- First & Middle Name(s)**: Janos
- Last Name**: Szucs
- Exact, sounds like, similar & initials
- Exact..
- Birth**: Year 1879, Location City, County, State, Country
- Lived In**: Location City, County, State, Country
- Arrival**: Year 1902, Location City, County, State, Country
- Departure**: Location City, County, State, Country
- Any Event**: Location City, County, State, Country
- Origin**: Location City, County, State, Country
- Destination**: Location City, County, State, Country
- Date Range Selector**:
  - Exact to...
  - this year
  - +/-1 year
  - +/-2 yrs
  - +/-5 years
  - +/-10 years

You can add +/- 1, 2, 5, or 10 years to give yourself a little wiggle room for rough estimates.

### Gather Identifiers

Sometimes the challenge isn't so much finding your ancestor's name in the records, as it is determining if it really is your ancestor. It's helpful to compile a mini-profile of your ancestor based on the information you may find in the record.

How old was your ancestor when he or she came to America? Census records are also a good source for estimating age at the time of immigration, as well as information from death records, tombstones, correspondence, marriage records, etc.

What did he or she do? Some passenger lists will list occupations. While this information typically isn't indexed in passenger arrival records, in some cases it can be helpful in "thinning the herd" to focus on the most promising individual(s).

Who might they have traveled with? Family structure can be helpful in locating families who traveled together, although it bears mentioning that it wasn't unusual for the head of the family or some family member to come over first and then send for the family later, once employment and a living space had been secured.

It can also be handy to have a list of other surnames that have appeared with your ancestor. Witnesses and sponsors, neighbors, collateral relatives, and anyone whose name keeps popping up in conjunction with your ancestor, could turn up as travel companions who arrived with your ancestors.

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## Learn Ethnic Names

Our ancestors may not have traveled with the Americanized version of their name that we're familiar with. Look for your ancestor's given name in his native language. [BehindtheName.com](http://BehindtheName.com) is helpful in finding some variants.

For surnames, look for information online and in print publications that can teach you the ins and outs of surnames in the land of your ancestors. For example, the website [PolishRoots.org](http://PolishRoots.org) has several articles and helpful [resources on Polish surnames](#). Search the Internet for other similar sites for your ancestor's background (e.g., German given names, Hungarian surnames, etc.).

## Check Multiple Ports

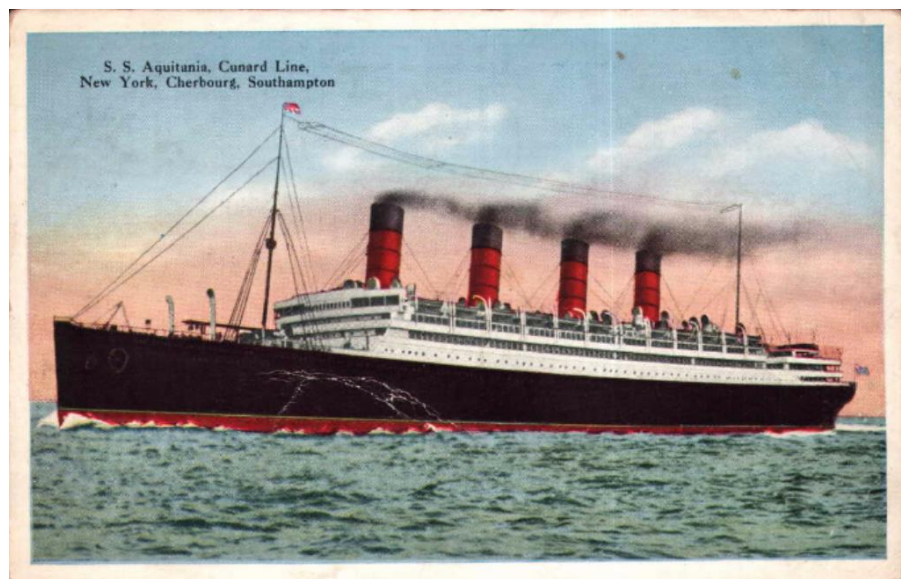
The story of ancestors arriving through Ellis Island is a popular one and although New York was the port of choice for millions of immigrants, many also traveled through Baltimore, Boston, Philadelphia, New Orleans, and other U.S. ports. In addition, for many years travel to Canada from Europe was cheaper, and you may find that your ancestor took that route to the U.S. Border Crossing records from [Canada to U.S. are available for the years 1895-1956](#), and [Canadian Passenger Lists](#) are available for 1865-1935. [Mexican Border Crossings, 1895-1964](#), can also be searched on Ancestry.

## Don't Stop Looking

Don't overlook the possibility that your ancestor may have made more than one trip. Sometimes—particularly in later years when steamships made the trip easier and faster—immigrants made several trips before finally settling in.

[Search passenger lists on Ancestry](#)

[Search border crossings and passports on Ancestry](#)



S.S. Aquitania, Cunard Line, 1914-1950. From Passenger Ships and Images.