

Finding Your Immigrant Ancestors

AT ANCESTRY.COM



Homeward Bound

More than 95 percent of Americans descend from individuals who did not live on this continent in the 18th century. While immigration has occurred steadily since the first settlers ventured to the new world, most arrivals can be categorized into three major waves:

FIRST WAVE: Settlers in the 1600s were fleeing religious persecution and/or seeking new opportunities in a comparatively richer land. Most immigrants from this wave were German, English, Welsh or Dutch.

SECOND WAVE: Crop failure, political turmoil and poor living conditions brought on by the industrial revolution all motivated people to leave their homelands for America in the 1800s. Additional migration motivation came from people seeking religious freedom. While immigrants arrived from around the world, the greatest numbers came from places including Scandinavia, Ireland, Scotland, England, Turkey, Armenia and China.

THIRD WAVE: Political turmoil and, ultimately, wars in Europe in the early to mid 1900s brought more immigrants to the U.S. Other immigrants sought relief from religious persecution or were seeking political asylum. Well-represented ethnicities in this immigration wave include German, Russian and Polish Jews, and Italians, Greeks and Austro-Hungarians.

Tip: Immigrants often settled near other immigrants from their home county - sometimes even the same hometown. You can contact people researching your ancestor's neighbors from the Member Connect panel on records at Ancestry.com.

Image:	25	of 43	Go	+	-
Oliver	W M 9				
Elizabeth	W F 1				
John	W M 5				
James	W M 28				
Anna	W F 44				
Perce	W F 23				

Click on the name to send a note to another researcher.

Life in America

Not all passenger arrival lists were created equally. Here's what you'll find and where to look to help fill in any blanks:

KEY DATES	WHAT YOU'LL FIND
Colonial period thru 1819	Passenger lists weren't required but some ship captains retained lists of all aboard ship. Search the Passenger and Immigration List Index to see if a record of your ancestor's arrival exists. Records in this collection date back to the 1500s.
1820 - 1893	Passenger lists first required to be kept; however, details on these lists are somewhat limited. To successfully identify an ancestor in a less-detailed list, look for the full family unit. Compare names, location information, dates and any other available details to facts you've discovered in later U.S. records about the family to determine if the person could really be your ancestor.
1893 - 1906	Sixteen new fields added to passenger lists, including marital status, last residence, final destination, literacy, financial status and others. Use each of these to help you determine if you're looking at the correct person.
1906 - ON	Manifests required to include a physical description of the passenger and place of birth; shortly thereafter, name and address of the closest living relative in the country of origin was added, too. Use the latter to help you locate the family in the homeland.

Tip: Seeing Double or Solo. You may find more than one passenger arrival record for your ancestor if he or she returned home to visit. You may also find a parent traveling solo — often the father would immigrate before other family members and secure a job and a home before the rest of the family arrived.

Steps to Discovering Your Immigrant Ancestor in the U.S. and the Homeland

STEP 1: BEGIN WITH RECORDS CREATED BY THE FAMILY IN THE U.S.

Start with the most recent records, including the 1930 and 1920 censuses, military draft registration cards, yearbooks, obituaries and other records at Ancestry.com.

HOW: Click on the Search tab at Ancestry.com to get started. Input the name of an ancestor who would have been living during the 20th century. Include other details — birth year, residence or birthplace and the names of other relatives — if available.

Save the records you find to your Ancestry.com family tree. Ancestry.com can use the details to help you discover even more.

WHERE NEXT: Use the information you discover to create more searches for the same family moving backwards in

time. Census records are full of details — and 20th-century records include information about immigration and/or naturalization — so try to discover each one your family appears in. And be sure to pay attention to birthplaces on all documents. A foreign birthplace points directly to your family's immigrant.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR: Click on the results returned and inspect the details. Family names, ages and relationships, birthplaces, occupations and addresses (scan horizontally across the page to see all of the information) can help you determine if you've found the correct family.

Tip: Check 20th-century census records for immigration year and/or naturalization status. Then use that information to help you focus your next search in the Immigration and Travel Collection.

Kitchener Samuel E.	Head	R 45	W 5	M	W	46	M	31	No	Yes	New York	Pennsylvania	Pennsylvania
— Louise	Wife			F	W	44	M	19	No	Yes	New York	Ireland	Ireland
— Frank R.	Son			M	W	18	S		No	Yes	Massachusetts	New York	New York
Sherman Lawrence	Roomer			M	W	32	M	24	No	Yes	Massachusetts	Massachusetts	Massachusetts
— Grace	Roomer			F	W	28	M	20	No	Yes	Massachusetts	Massachusetts	Massachusetts
— June	Roomer			F	W	5	S		No	Yes	Massachusetts	Massachusetts	Massachusetts
Kitchener George S.	Bother			M	W	44	S		No	Yes	Pennsylvania	Pennsylvania	Pennsylvania

STEP 2: FIND THE IMMIGRANT IN THE IMMIGRATION AND TRAVEL COLLECTION AT ANCESTRY.COM

Once you know who the immigrant was — and have his or her name, approximate birth year and other identifying details from census and other records — search for records directly related to his or her immigration.

HOW: Click on the Search tab at Ancestry.com. From the Special Collections list on the right side of the page, select Immigration and Travel to limit your search to records from this collection. Fill in the search form with details you've discovered about your family's immigrant — name, birth year, year of arrival — and search. Note that the form contains fields for names of other family members, locations where your ancestor may have lived, where he or she arrived in America, and more. You can fill these in later if you've received too many results, but be careful: immigration details reported years later on a census may not be entirely accurate.

Special Collections Card Catalog

Historical Records

Birth, Marriage & Death
 Birth, Baptism & Christening
 Marriage & Divorce
 Death, Burial, Cemetery & Obituaries

Census & Voter Lists
 U.S. Federal Census Collection
 UK Census Collection
 Canadian Census Collection
 More...

Immigration & Travel
 Passenger Lists
 Citizenship & Naturalization Records

Immigration & Travel

[Passenger Lists](#)

[Citizenship & Naturalization Records](#)

[Border Crossings & Passports](#)

[More...](#)

Tip: Discrepancies exist. Details in immigration records may not mirror what you've found elsewhere. Census immigration dates may be off by a few years and even first and last names may differ slightly (immigrants often Americanized their names AFTER arriving in America). Carefully analyze your finds and assess them against known facts to be sure you have the right person.

Steps to Discovering Your Immigrant Ancestor in the U.S. and the Homeland

STEP 2 CONTINUED

WHAT TO LOOK FOR: The Immigration and Travel collection includes passenger arrival lists, naturalization (citizenship) documents, passport applications and other records that link to a person's international travel.

Compare dates, family members and other details you find on an Immigration and Travel record to the information you've already collected about your ancestor to see if you've found a match.

WHERE NEXT: Your goal is to find the location of the home in the old country so you can dive into records created there. Some passenger lists and naturalization documents include this information — but not all do. Search for details in death certificates, church records, military documents and wills and resources in your own attic (place names may be listed on the backs of old photos and letters could point to family members who remained behind). Also look at immigration and travel records created by other immigrating family members, which may include the details even if your own ancestor's record don't. You'll find more tips for finding the hometown in the appendix at the end of this guide.

Ventura	Frank	Head	M	W	27
	Louise	Brother	M	W	20
	Potter	Brother	M	W	18
	Theresa	Sister	M	W	16
	Charles	Brother	M	W	16

Census record with Teresa Ventura's family

Family name	Given name	Yr.	Mo.
Ventura	Teresa	35	
son	Francesco	15	
"	Luigi	13	
"	Paquale	10	

Passenger list with the right Teresa shows the same family members and age ranges, but with ethnic-equivalent given names.

Family name	Given name	Yr.	Mo.
Ventura	Teresa	25	
son	Verghetti	4	
daug.	Angelina	2	
son	Geane	8	

Passenger list for a different Teresa Ventura can be ruled out since children's names and ages don't match the later U.S. census record.

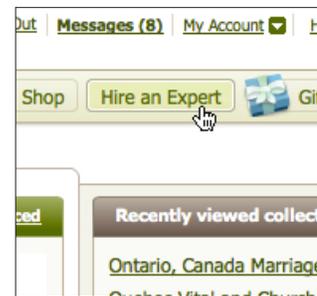
STEP 3: USE NAME, BIRTH DETAILS AND PLACE INFORMATION TO LOCATE YOUR ANCESTOR IN INTERNATIONAL RECORDS

Just like in the U.S., records in other countries were also created and retained on a local level. Knowing where your ancestor lived plus details about his or her family can help you pinpoint the right person when searching through international records.

HOW: Click on the Search tab at Ancestry.com and choose "Show Advanced." Then fill in the search form with details you've learned about your ancestor. At the bottom of the form is a "Collection Priority" option. Select the country you're interested in locating records from and choose "Show only records from this location." Be sure to undo these settings before your next search of all records at Ancestry.com.



WHERE NEXT: Your ancestors likely left a long trail through their homeland records but you may need assistance locating some of these. In addition to the searchable records at Ancestry.com, also use the site's message boards to find other researchers who can help. You can also hire a professional to assist with some — or all — of the research. You'll find details about professional research services at the "Hire an Expert" button.



Not sure a record you found is linked to your family? Save it to your Ancestry.com Shoebox so you can review it later after you've had time to learn more about the family.

GOOD TO KNOW

Having the following details handy can make searching for a foreign-born ancestor in U.S. passenger lists, international records and elsewhere much simpler:

- **Ethnic given name** (for instance “John” could also be Jan, Janos, Johann or Giovanni); search the Internet to find equivalents.
- **Surname variations**; sound the name out and see what types of phonetic spellings you can come up with; also search the Internet for variations of the name and review citizenship to see if aliases or name changes were included.
- **Age**; estimate from a census records or obtain from vital records.
- **Family structure**; you can discover the names of siblings in census records, which can help you locate the family immigrating, even if the surname has changed slightly.
- **Nationality**; use caution with Eastern European ancestors — countries changed names and borders often.
- **Estimated date of arrival**; 20th century census records include this detail as do citizenship (naturalization) documents; note that both were self-reported and could be off somewhat.

SEVEN TRICKS FOR TRICKY NAMES

Immigrant names can be tricky. Even something as simple as Luigi may have been changed to Lou after arrival. Use the following tricks to help you uncover your ancestor, regardless of the name he or she is hiding behind.

TRICK 1. Use the Internet to help you determine ethnic equivalent of an ancestor’s name. Sites like BehindtheName.com let you type in your ancestor’s name and search for related names that include various ethnic equivalents.

TRICK 2. Look for literal translations: the German surname Schwartz may have been changed to Black just like the French surname LeBlanc may have been changed to White.

TRICK 3. Lengthen and shorten names. And remember that more than one ancestor may have changed a surname. Weisenberger, for example, may have originally been changed to Weisenberg before becoming Weisen and finally, generations later, Wise.

TRICK 4. Try a wildcard search in which you use asterisks to replace some of the letters in a name. For example, if the surname was Berlengauem, B*rl*g*m* would produce it as well as Burlingame and other variants.

TRICK 5. Search by criteria. Forego the surname and search using birthplace, age, gender, occupation and other details to find people who match the ancestor you’re seeking. Pay special attention to the names in your search results. Do any of them seem to reflect your family?

TRICK 6. Check immigration records and passports carefully — at times they may include notations indicating a previous name change.

TRICK 7. Try maiden names. Female ancestors may have traveled using them, even when married.



27	813	Mary x Barrett	381 1 st Ave Harlem, NY	Minor Domestic	1861 Brooklyn NY Remericks	Oct 1879	Gas P.
30	847	Mary x Conlan	285 Ave C	None	Co Galway	1850	
"	856	"	21 Laurent	Domestic	Prussia	7 Feb 1852	Phun
49	2	Peter x O'Connell	St Nicholas White	Waiver	Co Monaghan	1848	Stana

ON A DOCKET

Court records aren't just for the criminally inclined (although those records are full of detail you won't find elsewhere). In the Tax, Criminal, Land and Wills collection at Ancestry.com, you'll also discover real estate transactions, small business dealings, records from the emigrant savings bank, probates and more. Search for all members of the family, read records carefully and check to see if the names of witnesses sound familiar, too. They may also be family.

IN THE MILITARY

Draft registration cards from World War I and World War II can be brimming with family details, including hometown, occupation and name of nearest kin. For earlier arrivals to the U.S., Civil War-era records – pensions, muster rolls, the 1890 Veterans Schedule census, enlistments and others – may be even more revealing.

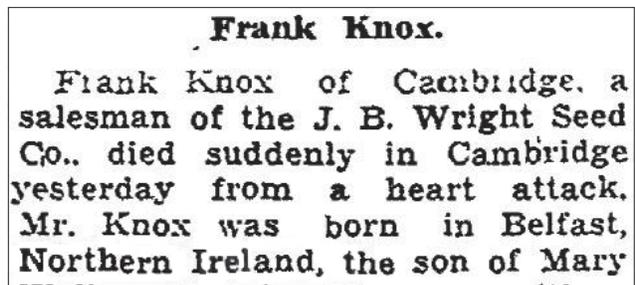
3	Date of birth	Nov 17, 1896
4	Place born	Ireland Irish
5	<input type="checkbox"/> I am <input type="checkbox"/> I have declared my intention <input type="checkbox"/> I am a citizen of the U.S.	
6	Place of birth of father	Ireland Irish
7	Name of employer	Interborough Rapid Transit Co
8	Place of residence	16 - Broadway, N.Y. City, N.Y.

BETWEEN THE LINES

Family stories may not always be entirely accurate, but they're often full of names, places and relationships and can help you figure out when your ancestor was where. Use them to build a timeline that you populate with details from the records you find. And enjoy the tales, which give you a better idea of the characters in your family tree.

MAKING HEADLINES

A graduation, engagement or even a visitor from out of town — any of these might have been big news at the time. Look in local newspapers for daily comings and goings as well as bigger events. And if your family is full of city dwellers, ask the local library if there were smaller, neighborhood or ethnicity-specific publications.



AT THE CEMETERY

A simple tombstone may hold the birthplace or middle name you've been trying to locate for years. The one next to it could offer an elusive maiden name. Families often stayed together, even in death, so a trip to the cemetery could introduce you to distant family lines you may not have heard of and other details your ancestor surely wanted you to know.



Image courtesy of Martha McCaffrey Dobbins, from the McCaffrey-Davis-Johnston-Stockard tree, <http://trees.ancestry.com/tree/2450685/family>