WAVES OF IMMIGRATION

Early immigrants to the country were predominantly French, arriving in the 17th century. Scottish settlers also came early on. Canada’s Great Migration occurred between 1815 and 1850, when more 800,000 immigrants arrived, mostly from Britain. An influx of Irish immigrants arrived around the years of Ireland’s potato famine (mid-1840s through early 1850s).

Tip: American and Chinese settlers in western Canada during the latter part of the 19th century may have been searching for gold. Search western Canada passenger lists and border crossings for clues.

CROSSING INTO THE U.S.

For much of the 19th century, European travel to Canada was more affordable than traveling to U.S. ports, a fact promoted by steamship companies serving Canadian routes. In addition to the cheaper fares, many immigrants avoided U.S. immigration policies by taking the Canadian route before crossing into the U.S.

In 1895 the U.S. government began requiring Canadian steamships and railroads to complete manifest forms and provide transportation to U.S. destinations only to immigrants who would have been allowed to enter the country via U.S. ports. Prior to this date, border crossings from Canada did not have to be recorded.

Tip: Americans and Canadians crossed the border for leisure travel and work, too.
STEP 1: BEGIN WITH RECORDS CREATED BY THE FAMILY IN THE U.S.

Start with the most recent records, including the 1940 and 1930 censuses, military draft registration cards, yearbooks, obituaries, and other records at Ancestry.

How: Click on the Search tab at Ancestry 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.

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 in U.S. records. Pay close attention to birthplaces, which were recorded in censuses beginning in 1850.

Where next: Use the information you discover to create more searches for the same family, moving back in time. Focus on the full family unit: note names of siblings and research them as well. Remember that family members who never lived in Canada may have crossed the border to visit other branches of the family there, and immigrants who traveled through Canada may have lived in Canada for a few years or more before migrating to the U.S. While neither of these will include a Canadian place of birth, both scenarios could give you a trail to follow in Canadian records.

Tip: Even if you already know your Canadian immigrant ancestor, you’ll still want to start with the most recent records available and march back in time. That way you’ll know you’re researching the right family and the right immigrant and gathering all of the great details available.

STEP 2: LOOK FOR YOUR FAMILY’S CANADIAN CONNECTION IN THE IMMIGRATION & TRAVEL COLLECTION ON ANCESTRY

If you’ve discovered a birthplace in Canada during your search, you’ll know quickly who your family’s immigrant was. But even if you haven’t, you may still find a family member in passenger lists and border crossings between the U.S. and Canada.

How: Click on the Search tab at Ancestry. 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. No known immigrant from Canada? Try a broader approach and look for individual family members or even just the family surname, birthplace, and “lived in” location.
Finding your Canadian ancestors

**What to look for:** In crossings from Canada to the U.S., look for details about final destination of the traveler as well as whom he or she is joining, closest relative in their home country, and whether the traveler has ever been in the U.S. before. Crossings from the U.S. into Canada may include occupation information, birthplace, and intended destination. All of these details point to new records to search for and can help you determine if you’re looking at the right family.

**Where next:** Use the details you find in the Immigration & Travel collection to help you get started searching through Canadian records. And carefully analyze all finds you make in the Immigration & Travel collection so you can assess the details against the facts you’ve found previously.

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

Use the same steps you use for U.S. research on your family in Canada. Start with the most recent records you’re likely to find them in—census records are key resources in Canada, too. Look for more immigration clues, this time for the immigrant ancestor who first came to Canada. As always, make note of the entire family unit as you search. You can use these details to help you compare earlier documents you find to ensure you’re on the right track.

**How:** Click on the Search tab at Ancestry and then click Show more options. Fill in the search form with details you’ve learned about your ancestor. At the bottom of the form is a Collection Focus option. Select Canada as the priority. (Be sure to undo these settings before conducting your next search of all records.)

**Tip:** Discrepancies exist. Details in immigration and naturalization records may not mirror what you’ve found elsewhere. Analyze records carefully and have an open mind before discarding a non-exact result.
Where next: Much like U.S. family trees, Canadian family trees usually began with an immigrant ancestor. Use the details you collect in more modern records to continue your search back in time until you reach the immigrant to Canada. Then look for records that will help you find him or her in the former homeland.

Key Resources at Ancestry for Researching Canadian Connections

**U.S. Federal Census Collection and Canadian Census Collection**
Discover more about your family’s life and find the clues you’ll need to follow them back through generations in both the U.S. and Canada.

**Immigration & Travel Collection**
Uncover migration paths, timing, and other details about ancestors who crossed between the U.S. and Canada; immigrant ancestors may also have filled out paperwork to obtain citizenship.

**Military Collection**
Learn more about military service in both the U.S. and Canada. Some records include details about land grants, pensions, or burials; others provide personal stories and information about other relatives.

**Canadian and U.S. City Directories and Canadian School Directories**
Follow family members through residences or school attendance; directories often contain unique family details and help fill in during non-census years.

**The Drouin Collection (CA)**
Search a vast collection of birth, marriage, death, notarial, and other miscellaneous records from parishes in Quebec as well as French Catholic parish records from Ontario, Acadia, and the U.S.

**Message Boards**
Connect with other researchers who have experience discovering families in Canadian records and towns.

**Family Trees**
Link to other family members, possibly even distant cousins, who are also researching the same family lines that you are; one of them may have the details you’re searching for.

Tip: Always view the original image. While the typed search result you receive has a lot of information, the original image may contain even more—including clues to other relatives.

Note the search result for Luigi provides his birthplace, arrival date, and other details, but page 2 of the passenger list image also states Luigi’s destination in the U.S., health condition, physical description, and more.
Taking French-Canadian ancestors back to Europe

French-Canadian family lines? Lucky you: detailed marriage records may make it easier for you to follow that family all the way back to their European immigrants.

1. Start by identifying the husband and wife in your family tree who were married in French Canada.

2. Search Birth, Marriage and Death records from Canada at Ancestry to find their marriage in a marriage index.

3. Next, record the names of the parents of the bride and groom.

4. Repeat #2 and #3 for each set of parents, continuing the process until you reach immigrant ancestors.

Still can’t find the family? Try these tricks

Some ancestors are pros at hiding. Beat them at a game of hide-and-seek with the following tricks:

**Trick 1**

Think the name might be to blame? Try a wildcard search by using asterisks to replace some of the letters in a name. For example, if the surname was Lefevre, Le*e*re would produce it, as well as Lefebre and other variants.

**Trick 2**

Search by criteria. Forego your ancestor’s 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 be reflected in your family?

**Trick 3**

Follow your ancestor back in time by address in a city directory. You may get lucky and discover that the family remained in the same residence for years, even if their name changed slightly.

**Trick 4**

On border crossings and passenger lists, be sure to note relatives’ names and other travelers from the same location as your ancestor; it’s a great way to find new family connections.

**Trick 5**

Listen to family stories. While there’s plenty of fiction to be heard out there, even the wildest tales usually hold an inkling of truth. One of the leads may point you right to your ancestor.