

## **Chapter 4: Finding Your Ancestors in Immigration, Probate, Land, and Military Records**

To find additional information on your ancestors, search in immigration, probate, land, and military records. These records contain important vital statistics and biographical entries. Since 1938, the Church has acquired copies of these records on microfilm and microfiche. You can search the FamilySearch Catalog (FSC) for records from areas where your ancestors lived. Any of the microfilms listed there are available to loan to any FamilySearch center.

### ***Immigration to the United States***

It is difficult to assess the number of immigrants that have come to America. From 1600 to 1776, statisticians conclude that 2 million people sought refuge in America. The predominant population through these early years was from the British Isles. From 1783 to 1820, approximately 500,000 more immigrants arrived from Great Britain and Germany. From 1821 to 1880, over 10 million immigrants came to the United States from England, Ireland, and Germany. It was not until 1881 that large numbers of Italians, Poles, Jews, Greeks, Russians, Slavs, Turks, Armenians, Syrians, and Portuguese came to America, adding 24 million people. An additional six million immigrants came from Europe and Asia between 1921 and 1950. Persons who crossed between 1820 and 1892 often passed through the Immigration Center at Castle Garden. The Castle Garden database is available at <http://castlegarden.org>. Ellis Island in New York, founded in 1892, was the largest port of immigration. New York passenger arrival records are on the Internet at [www.ellislandrecords.org](http://www.ellislandrecords.org). *New York Arrivals* lists are also available at [www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com).

#### **Numbers of Immigrants Arriving in United States Ports from 1820–1920**

New York (23,960,000)  
Boston (2,050,000)  
Baltimore (1,460,000)  
Philadelphia (1,240,000)  
New Orleans (710,000)  
San Francisco (500,000)  
Key West (130,000)  
Portland-Falmouth (120,000)  
Galveston (110,000)  
Passamaquoddy (80,000)  
New Bedford (40,000)  
Providence (40,000)  
Charleston (20,000)

## ***Passenger Arrival Lists***

In 1820 the United States Customs Service began keeping a regular list of immigrants. On the compiled lists are written the place of origin and foreign port of embarkation. Customs passenger lists were not kept after the establishment of the Immigration and Naturalization Service passenger lists in 1891. Immigration passenger lists often provide an immigrant's last place of residence and birthplace. FamilySearch is in the process of indexing many of the passenger list records in their possession. Immigrants who entered the United States through Canadian ports from 1895-1954 may be found in indexes and passenger lists of the St. Albans, Vermont District. They are available on microfilm at FamilySearch centers. The films are found in the FamilySearch Catalog under the locality: "Vermont-Emigration/Immigration" and "United States-Emigration/Immigration."

Passenger arrival lists for most American ports exist as microfilm copies in the Family History Library and can be found through the FamilySearch Catalog. Passenger embarkation lists for some non-American ports have been microfilmed and are also available in the Family History Library. To find passenger lists for any port, perform a locality or place search in the FamilySearch Catalog using the name of the port city. If you are looking for Family History Library copies of emigration records kept by government officials in any county, perform a locality search in the FamilySearch Catalog using the name of the country or the name of the state, province, or county within the country in which your ancestor lived. Remember that these records are found under the topic Emigration and Immigration in FamilySearch Catalog entries for localities. Also remember that most of the microfilms in the FamilySearch Catalog can be ordered for your use by any FamilySearch center.

Before searching microfilm, you may want to check and see what collections have been digitized and added to online databases. Ancestry.com, FamilySearch.org, and immigration websites like ellisland.org are working to digitize passenger lists and make them available online.

### **Records in the U.S. National Archives and Records Administration**

The National Archives and Records Administration in Washington, D. C., has four major groups of genealogical records:

1. Federal census schedules, 1790-1930
2. Passenger arrival lists (immigration records) since 1820
3. Military records (pension applications, service records, etc.)
4. Federal land records (homestead records, bounty land records, etc.)

The National Archives also has census indexes, records for Native Americans and African Americans, federal naturalization records, and other federal records. See the *Guide to Genealogical Research in the National Archives of the United States* (Eales and Kvasnicka 2000) for more information. Many of these records are available as microfilm copies in the Family History Library and can be loaned to any FamilySearch center. Some of these records can be accessed online at <http://www.archives.gov>. Additional records can be found at the Library of Congress, <http://www.loc.gov>.

## ***Naturalization Records***

Naturalization records include Declarations of Intention, Petitions for Citizenship, and Certificates of Naturalization. On the Declaration of Intention, the immigrant renounces allegiance to foreign rulers. Then, after fulfilling the residence requirements, he or she petitions for citizenship. Candidates for citizenship were required to live in the United States for five years. An individual must live at least one year in the state where they file their petition for citizenship. After being granted citizenship by a Court of Record, a Citizenship Certificate of Naturalization is issued. Each certificate is attached to a stub containing a summary of the new citizen's personal information.

### **Information on Naturalization Records**

- Petitioner's age
- Name changes
- Birthplace
- Port of debarkation
- Marital status
- Mailing address
- Names of spouse and children

Naturalization applications were processed by district/federal, state, county, or other local courts. On 27 September 1906, the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) began filing copies of all naturalization applications. To obtain a copy of your ancestor's naturalization records after 26 September 1906, contact the INS District Office of the area where your ancestors lived or the INS Office in your community. You can also check online resources such as [FamilySearch.org](http://FamilySearch.org) or [Ancestry.com](http://Ancestry.com) to see if they have digitized naturalization records.

### **Helpful Resources for Naturalization Records**

- *Guide to Genealogical Research in the National Archives of the United States* (Eales Kvasnicka 2000) lists United States District Court Naturalization Records.
- The Works Progress Administration (WPA) inventories for U. S. counties describes county records; to find these inventories, search the Family History Library Catalog for the county in which ancestors lived under the topic “Archives–Inventories.”
- Search Family History Library Catalog listings under county and state for “Archives and libraries–Inventories” and “Naturalization and citizenship.”
- County courthouses and state archives maintain declarations, petitions, and naturalization certificate stubs that describe ancestors.
- *Guide to Naturalization Records of the United States* by Christina K. Schaefer (1997) includes information about naturalization records for each state and county with addresses and phone numbers for repositories.

### **Sources for Finding an Immigrant’s Place of Birth or Residence**

- County, town, and local church histories
- Religious encyclopedias of ministers immigrating with their congregations during the 1600s and 1700s
- Federal passport applications (Family History Library films for 1795-1924: Search catalog under U. S.– Emigration/Immigration)
- Membership files of fraternal organizations
- Employment files
- Insurance papers, wills, deeds
- FamilySearch databases (i.e., Ancestral File, International Genealogical Index)

### ***Probate Records***

Probate records divide a deceased person’s estate among the heirs. Some of the most important probate records include wills and administrations (admons). If an individual dies after making a will, he or she dies “testate.” The estate of the “intestate,” or the individual who dies without a will, is probated according to the terms of a letter of administration (admon).

### **Information in a Typical Will**

- Testator's name
- Date of will
- Bequests to spouse and children of real estate and chattel (bedsteads, farm implements, etc.)
- Relationships
- Bequests to friends
- Instructions to the executor charged with overseeing the terms of the will
- Testator's signature or seal
- Witnesses' signatures

### **Information in Administration Papers**

- Death date of person whose estate is under administration
- Name of the administrator, often the surviving spouse or eldest son
- Names of creditors or debtors
- Estate inventory
- Occupation of the deceased
- Seldom lists all of the children. Those who died before the testator or who previously received their inheritance may not be named.
- A testator's wife may not necessarily be the mother of the children named. The term "cousin" often means "niece" or "nephew." The term "in-law" is a catch-all word for any degree of relationship. "Brother" or "sister" may not imply blood relationship.

### Helpful Sources for Finding Probate Records

- In the United States, county courts have jurisdiction over probate matters.
- Check United States county listings in the Family History Library Catalog with a subject search for “Probate records.” If the matter involves orphans and guardians, search the Family History Library Catalog for records under the topic “Guardianship.”
- *Ancestry’s Red Book*, revised edition, edited by Alice Eichholz (1992), provides the correct name and year probate records commenced in the specific county probate court.
- In Great Britain, search ecclesiastical court records for probate records before 1858. After 1858 check the Principle Probate Registry. Refer to David Pratt’s (1992a) *Researching British Probates* for more information.

### Research Tip

Many research methodology articles have been published in genealogical periodicals. The *Periodical Source Index* (PERSI), compiled by the Allen County Public Library Foundation, is an index of over 11,000 articles in genealogical and historical journals and periodicals published from 1800 to the present. It is a great place to find research that has been compiled and published about your family or the places where your family lived. It is a subject index and does not necessarily include every name or place that the journals contain. Periodicals and journals are a great resource for published compiled records and historical articles that give background information about places and events. To search PERSI, go to the Heritage Quest website ([www.heritagequestonline.com](http://www.heritagequestonline.com)). For more information about PERSI, see the FamilySearch Wiki article entitled “Periodical Source Index (PERSI).”

Methodology articles are also published online and can help researchers identify ways in which they can improve their own research. Search [www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com) and [www.genealogy.com](http://www.genealogy.com) for examples or use a standard Internet search engine.

Ancestry.com. 1997. Provo, Utah. [www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com) (accessed June 23, 2009).

Greene, David L. *The American Genealogist*. Demorset, Georgia: n.p.

*National Genealogical Society Quarterly*. Washington, D.C.: National Genealogical Society.

*The New England Historical and Genealogical Register*. Boston: New England Historic Genealogical Society.

Utah Genealogical Association. *Crossroads*. Salt Lake City: Utah Genealogical Association.

## ***Land Records: Deeds and Mortgages***

Deeds and mortgages are land records that verify the title of a property purchased from a grantor (seller) and sold to a grantee (buyer). Search for deeds in the FamilySearch Catalog under the county of residence in the United States or the state/province, manor, district or notary office having jurisdiction in Europe. The subject heading for all land records in the FamilySearch Catalog is “Land and Property.” Deeds and mortgages are usually indexed by grantor or grantee.

### **Information found in Deeds**

- The date the land was sold.
- Name, residence, and occupation of grantor and grantee.
- The amount paid by the grantee.
- Previous owners of the property (sometimes).
- Name of grantor’s wife when she released her right to the property.
- Detailed description of the property, sometimes including names of nearby neighbors.
- The date the transaction was recorded.
- Whether the property was inherited under provisions of a will, military bounty, or homestead.

### **Other Valuable Land Records Available at County Clerk’s Offices or the Family History Library**

- Tax lists
- Surveys
- Survey maps
- Bounty land warrants
- Land lotteries
- Grants
- Mineral/mining entries

## ***Military Records***

The most valuable U.S. military records for family historians are pension applications submitted by soldiers or their surviving spouse. The Family History Library has a large collection of pension records. They can be found in the FamilySearch Catalog by searching under “United States Military Records.”

### Information on Military Pension Applications

- Birth date and place
- Age at enlistment
- Regiment
- Physical description (hair, eye color, height, distinguishing marks)
- Military campaigns and battles
- Disabilities incurred through military service
- Testimonies of contemporaries
- Places of residence
- Marriage (if applied for by the surviving spouse)
- Occasional names and birth dates of heirs

### ***War Pensions***

War pension records can be found at the following locations:

- Revolutionary War pension applications (indexed) are on microfilm at the Family History Library.
- Extensive collections on Revolutionary War Soldiers and their descendants are housed at:

National Society Daughters of the American Revolution  
1776 D Street NW  
Washington, D.C. 20006

National Society Sons of the American Revolution  
1000 South Fourth Street  
Louisville, KY 40203

- Spanish–American War: See FamilySearch Catalog listings under “United States–Military records–Pensions–Indexes”.
- Civil War: Confederate pensions were awarded by the southern states. Most of the applications for the Confederate pensions are microfilmed and available through the Family History Library. Confederate records have also been digitized and published on Fold3.com for most states. (If unavailable at these sources, write to the state.)
- World War I: Draft records are available on microfilm at the Family History Library or a local FamilySearch center. Search under “United States–Military Records–World War, 1914–1918.” Also check the Records section on FamilySearch.org.

For a copy of a pension file, write to:  
National Archives and Records Administration  
700 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20408

- Navy and Marine records: See FamilySearch Catalog listings under “Military records.”