

Why Finding Atlantic Shipping Records is Challenging

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<https://www.rayson.us/ae Hanson/presentations/current/atlantic-migration-to-america/>

Between 1500 and 1914 approximately 40 million people crossed the Atlantic and settled in the United States, and another 5 million settled, at least initially, in Canada. Finding records for these emigrants can be challenging and frustrating. This presentation will provide attendees with an understanding of how emigrants traveled to North America during this timeframe, an overview of the records that documented their journeys and a strategy for locating available records.

Terminology

- Emigration – Leaving a country and settling somewhere else
- Transmigration – Passing through a country while emigrating
- Immigration – Entering a country and settling there

How did they travel?

Atlantic Crossings by Sail

- This was the only option until the mid 1800's
- A normal, uneventful trip took 7 – 8 weeks
- Schedules were unreliable
- Emigrants congregated at the point of departure waiting for their ship
- The entire trip could take 2 – 5 months

Atlantic Crossings: Steam Ships

- Steam powered ships emerged in the 1850's
 - Sailing ships continued to sail during this transition period
- 1865 – 1st year more people traveled on steamships than sailing ships
- Steam effectively took over by 1880
- Regular schedules were established
- Crossing times reduced to 1 week by 1914

Atlantic Crossings: Steam Trains

- Use of Steam powered trains also expanded greatly during this period.
- Made it easier to travel to the port departure
 - Enabled development of integrated train/ship routes and schedules
- Made it easier to travel from the point of arrival to more distant destination

Why did they come?

- Food Shortage
- To escape oppression
- Economic Opportunity
- Cheap/free land

- Slavery

Prior to 1820: Organized Migration

- The 1st Wave
- England established outposts in the new colony
- Native American population was decimated
- There was a shortage of labor
- Rotterdam and Antwerp were major ports of departure
- Emigrants could get there by sailing down the Rhine
- Approximately 1.2 Million people arrived in this period
- Protestants from northwestern Europe
 - Settlers recruited for chartered colonies
 - Religious missionaries
 - Exiles
 - Soldiers
 - Convicted laborers
 - Indentured servants
 - Slaves
 - Brought into Virginia as early as 1619
 - Most arrived before 1780
 - It is estimated that 800,000 were in the US by 1808 (when the importation of slaves into the United States was banned)
 - In 1820 slaves represented 16% of the United States population
- **Major Ports**
 - **Philadelphia**
 - Popular port of arrival for immigrants settling East of the Alleghenies
 - Agricultural Germans and Scotch-Irish settlers
 - **New York**
 - Became more popular than Philadelphia
 - Provided better transportations options to Buffalo, Cleveland and Milwaukee
 - Railroads and (1846) Erie Canal
 - **New Orleans**
 - Longer voyage (2 – 3 weeks longer)
 - Ships were inferior
 - Travel up the Mississippi was unpleasant & dangerous.

1820 – 1890: Autonomous Migration

- The 2nd Wave: 15 Million Immigrants
- Rapid industrialization provided opportunities for migrants of modest means and/or skills
- Advances in transportation (steamships and railway networks) made travel easier, more reliable and more economical
- By 1840 Le Havre became a more attractive port than Rotterdam or Antwerp
- European barriers to emigrating (such as serfdom) were removed
- Government policies facilitated transatlantic relocation

- Military conscription and ethnic discrimination prompted mass migration out of Eastern Europe
- Countries of Origin
 - Irish (Potato Famine – 1847)
 - German (failure of the democratic revolutions of 1848)
 - Scandinavians
 - Chinese
- Vast majority of the US arrivals were processed in New York City
 - Castle Garden established in 1855

1890 – 1920's

- 3rd Wave
- Approximately 22.3 million people
 - From Southern and Eastern Europe (Italy, Russia, Austro-Hungary)
- 75% came through New York
 - Ellis Island replaced Castle Garden in 1898
- Emigration was severely restricted at the outset of WWI

Regulations & Records

Prior to 1820

- No records or documentation were required for immigrants arriving by ship in the United States
- Philadelphia was the major port of entry

The Steerage Act of 1819

- a.k.a. the Manifest of Immigrants Act
- Took effect in 1820
- Passed to alleviate overcrowding of passenger ships
- *Customs Passenger Lists* were submitted to U.S. Customs on arrival
 - Name
 - Age
 - Gender
 - Occupation
 - Country of Origin
 - Destination
- Only applied to ships arriving at United States ports
- Canada did not (yet) have similar requirements

Additional Laws, Regulations and Events

- 1825: Erie Canal opened, New York surpassed Philadelphia as the busiest US port of entry.
- 1849: Changes in British law made Canadian ports much more desirable for shipping companies
- 1855: Castle Garden immigration center opened in New York
- 1865: Canada began documenting immigrants (similar to US records)
 - Schedule A – Particulars Relative to the Vessel
 - Canadian Ports of entry:
 - Quebec and Montreal (Summer)

- John and Halifax (Winter)
- 1883: US begins requiring an Immigration Passenger List
 - k.a. “Ship Manifests”
 - Similar to earlier records, adds:
 - Birthplace or Last Residence
 - Marital Status
 - Previous US residence
 - Destination
 - Names or relatives in country of origin
- 1891:
 - Federal government established immigrant receiving stations at all US Ports of entry.
 - Inspection and deportation of emigrants begins in the US
 - The 1st Immigration Inspection Station established at the US – Canadian border
 - ~40% of Canadian Immigrants were traveling directly to the United States
 - US Compliance for Canadian Ports of Entry
- 1893:
 - Immigration Manifest Forms were standardized
 - Additional information was required (5 -> 21 columns)
 - 1903 – Race was added
 - 1906 – Six more items were added (personal description, place of birth)
 - 1907 – Name and address of nearest living relative was added
- 1895:
 - Established a uniform Passenger Manifest form
 - US laws and rules were applied to all US-bound passengers
 - Tickets for transportation to the US were only provided to those who appeared to admissible under US law
 - The US placed Immigration Service agents at Canadian seaports to collect the manifests and inspect US-bound passengers
 - US Compliance for Canadian Ports of Entry
- 1906:
 - Canada began to document immigration of Canadians to the US
 - Prior to this documentation was only required for those born outside of Canada
 - US Began documenting immigrants from Mexico
 - Card Manifest was created for each person
 - Recorded the same information as the ship manifest

Search Strategy

Begin by Researching the Basics

- Birth
- Marriage
- Death

- Burial
- Children
- Parents
- Siblings
- Occupation

Additional Immigration Facts

- Reason for immigration
- Port of Departure
- Name of the ship
- Traveling companions
- Route Traveled
- Port of Arrival
- Date of Arrival
- Age on arrival
- Final Destination

Basic Information You Need to Begin

- Full Original Name
 - Recorded at the point of embarkation
- Date of Arrival
- Age at Arrival

Transmigration

- Immigrants did not always sail directly from their native country
 - Many traveled to Rotterdam, Antwerp, Le Havre, Bremen and Hamburg from other countries
- Many entered the United States via Canada
 - Sometimes it was the least expensive route
 - Some chose that route to avoid US regulations
- Many European emigrants passed through England on their way to North America
- England dominated the Atlantic route (because of the number of British and Irish immigrants)
 - More ships
 - Better Service
 - Lower cost
- This dominance grew as they established feeder routes to England from the rest of Europe

Hull, England

- The largest transmigration port in England
 - Between 1836 and 1915 about 2.2 Million emigrants from Denmark, Finland, Germany, Norway, Russia and Sweden passed through Hull
- They would remain on their ships until their train was ready
- Then they would travel directly to Liverpool, Glasgow, London or Southampton and immediately board their ship
 - The train station was usually immediately adjacent to the boat dock
- Grimsby was also a major transmigration port

- They All Sailed From England (or Scotland)
 - Regardless of their county of origin
 - Keep this in mind when searching for them

Don't Make Assumptions About the Route

- April 1903 – Great Grandfather Hans Isakson sails from Liverpool to **Quebec**
- February 1904 – Sons sail from Liverpool to **Boston**
- March 1904 – Wife and daughters sail from Liverpool to **Boston**
- February 1906 – daughter sails from Liverpool to **Halifax, Nova Scotia**
- May 1908 – Grandmother sails from Oslo directly to **New York**

Immigrants Ships Transcribers Guild

- <https://immigrantships.net>

Online Search Tips

Quality of the Information Recorded

- The information was recorded at the port of departure
- The informant and the recorder may not have spoken the same language
- The informant may not have been able to read or write

The Database May Have Incorrect Information

- The recorder's handwriting may be hard to read
- The condition of the document may have deteriorated prior to transcription, making accurate transcription difficult or impossible

Search Other Repositories

- If the images have been indexed by somebody else, try searching their database
- Sometimes things get indexed differently

Age on Arrival and/or Year of Birth

- Most search engines are sensitive to the year of birth or age on arrival
 - They will restrict results to match what you specify
- If these are indexed incorrectly, they may cause your search to fail
 - You know they were 50, but it was indexed as 20
 - Possibly it was not indexed at all
- Possible solutions:
 - Specify a very wide date range
 - Don't specify the age on arrival in your search query
 - Don't specify the birth year on arrival in your search query

Names

- It is very common for names to be recorded incorrectly
- Some emigrants intentionally changed their names when they immigrated
- Possible Solutions
 - Only specify a first name
 - Only specify a last name
 - Use wildcards to get around spelling variations

Wild Card Characters

- Special instructions to the search engine
- The most popular one is the asterisk (*)

- It means “look for zero or more characters in this position”
- A search for “Hans*” would match on these (and many more) names
 - **Hans**
 - **Hanson**
 - **Hansen**
 - **Hanssen**
 - **Hansson**
 - **Hansdatter**
- The asterisk can be used anywhere in the string
 - *born (to search for variations on Amborn)
 - Johansd*ter (to search for variations of datter/daughter)
- Another popular one is the question mark (?)
 - It means “look for any character in this position”
- A search for “Hans?n” would match on these names
 - **Hanson**
 - **Hansen**

Search For Travel Companions

- If you have names other people who were traveling with your emigrant, try searching for them instead
- If you can locate them, your emigrant may be listed nearby

Looking for my Great Grandfather

- I knew was traveling with his nephew:
 - Otto Lorentsen who lived on the Handaa farm
 - I found him listed as **Otto L Handa**
- My Grandfather was listed on the next line

Some Returned Home

- Some migrants did not enjoy life in the new world and returned home permanently
- Others went home to visit
- It was not unusual for them to bring new emigrants back with them when they returned to the US

Look For Records in the Country of Departure

- You may find something in that record that will help you find them in the US arrival records
- Example
 - My grandmother was born Inger Marie Antonsdatter
 - I found the record of her departure in the Regional Archives of Norway
 - She decided to change her name to Inga Marie Dahl

Newspapers

- Ship departures and arrivals were reported in local newspapers
- If you know when and where your immigrant ancestors ship arrived, you may be able to find a notice in the paper
- This may tell you when the ship departed, where it sailed from and other information about the voyage

Arrival via Canada

- Arrivals were not recorded until 1865
- US-bound arrivals after 1894 were handled differently
 - Cleared Canadian quarantine
 - Inspection by US Immigration Service agents
 - Issuance of a “Certificate of Admission”
 - Immigrants who had arrived in Canada within 30 days had to show their “Certificate of Admission” to board a US-bound train

St. Albans Border Crossing Records

- All of the records created by the US Agents in Canada were sent to Montreal to be filed
- These records were later moved to the INS district office in St. Albans, Vermont in the United States
- *Vermont, St. Albans Canadian Border Crossings, 1895-1954 (Canada to the U.S.)*

NARA Microfilms Publications

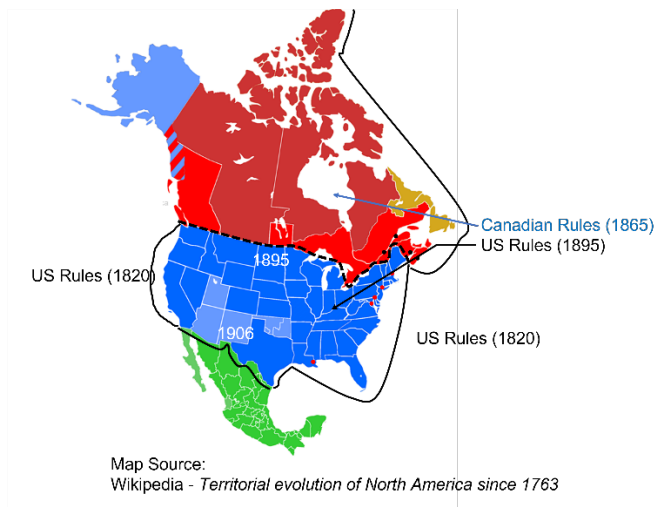
- M1464 – Emigration from 1895 – 1954
 - Chronological Order
- M1461 – Soundex Name Index of 1895 – 1954 Emigrants
 - Created from the original manifests
 - Sorted by Soundex code, then First/Middle name
 - Isakson
 - Soundex Code I225
 - Rolls 202, I126 Hija – I460 Winnie

Still no luck?

- Thoroughly document (add sources) everything that is known
- Create a timeline of events
- Determine earliest and latest possible dates of arrival
- Document all known sources of information
- Record search results
- Go through relevant image collections image by image
- Consider hiring a professional researcher

Summary

- Discover as much as you can about your ancestor
 - Know what records existed at the time they immigrated
 - Consider all possible routes of travel
 - Take advantage of online records
 - Be creative in searching
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Resources and References

- *They Came In Ships*
 - John P Colletta, Ph.D.
 - ISBN 0-916489-37-X
- *German Roots German Genealogy (formerly the "Wee-Monster" genealogy website) – Emigration and Immigration Records*
 - <https://www.germanroots.com/>
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 - <https://www.germanroots.com/>
- *Vermont, St. Albans Canadian Border Crossings, 1895-1954* (Family Search)
 - <https://www.familysearch.org/search/collection/2185163>
- National Archives: Mexican Border Crossings
 - <https://www.archives.gov/research/immigration/border-mexico>
- National Archives: By Way of Canada – U.S. Records of Immigration Across the U.S. – Canadian Border, 1895 – 1954 (St. Albans Lists)
 - <https://www.archives.gov/publications/prologue/2000/fall/us-canada-immigration-records-1.html>
- *Migration from Northern Europe to America via the Port of Hull, 1848-1914*
 - <http://www.norwayheritage.com/articles/templates/voyages.asp?articleid=28&zoneid=6>
- Bibliography: *Bridging the Atlantic: Finding the Ancestral Home* by Lloyd deWitt Bockstruck, A.B. cum laude, M.A., M.S., FNGS, FTSGS
 - https://dallasgenealogy.com/DGS_Docs/Bockstruck/LDB_S3_Bib_118_Bridging_the_Atlantic_Immigrant_Ancestors.pdf
- National Archives: *Soundex System – The Soundex Indexing System* (Includes a link to an online Soundex Calculator)
 - <https://www.archives.gov/research/census/soundex.html>
- *A Look at Le Havre, a Less-Known Port for German Emigrants*
 - <https://19thcenturyrhinelandlive.blogspot.com/2011/10/look-at-le-havre-less-known-port-for.html>
- *The Date An Ancestor Left For America*

- <https://19thcenturyrhinelandlive.blogspot.com/2014/01/travel-tuesday-date-ancestor-left-for.html>
- Transportation of Immigrants and Reception Arrangements 1800s – Gjenvick-Gjønvik Archives
 - <https://www.ggarchives.com/Immigration/OtherIssuesAndProblems/1911-11-TransportationOfImmigrantsAndReceptionArrangements1800s.html#gsc.tab=0>