

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	Sam	1		
Elizabeth	W F 1	Daughter	1		
John	W M 54		1		
James	W M 48		1		
Ann	W F 44	Wife	1		
Perce	W F 33	Daughter	1		

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.

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.

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.

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.

The screenshot shows the 'Special Collections' menu on Ancestry.com. The 'Immigration & Travel' section is highlighted with a yellow box, and a mouse cursor is pointing at it. The menu includes the following categories:

- 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** (highlighted)
 - 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	Partner	M	W	20
	Potter	Partner	M	W	18
	Theresa	Sister	M	W	16
	Charles	Partner	M	W	16

Census record with Teresa Ventura's family

Family name	Given name	Yr.	Mo.
Ventura	Teresa	35	
"	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

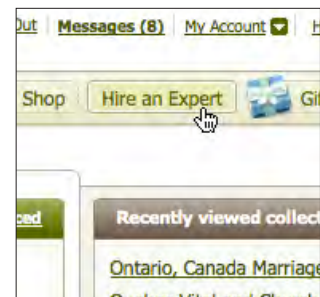
Just like in the U.S., records in other countries were also created and retained on a local level. Knowing where your ancestor lived plus details about his or her family can help you pinpoint the right person when searching through international records.

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.

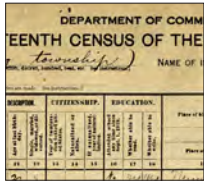


WHERE NEXT: Your ancestors likely left a long trail through their homeland records but you may need assistance locating some of these. In addition to the searchable records at Ancestry.com, also use the site's message boards to find other researchers who can help. You can also hire a professional to 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.

Key Resources at Ancestry.com for Researching Immigrant Ancestry



U.S. FEDERAL CENSUS COLLECTION — to help you discover more about your family's life in the U.S. and to give you the clues you'll need to follow them back through generations until you reach your family's immigrant ancestor.



OBITUARIES AND NEWSPAPERS — to locate other family lines and possibly the birthplace of an ancestor; check for obituaries for siblings, too, some of which may contain additional details.



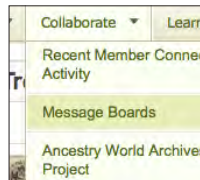
IMMIGRATION AND TRAVEL COLLECTION — to discover the moment your ancestor arrived as well as details reported to obtain citizenship; note that women and children may not have naturalization records and may have been naturalized through a parent or spouse, depending on laws at the time.



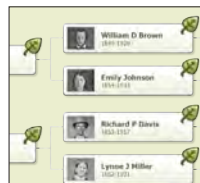
LOCATION MAPS — to quickly view all of the records available from a specific location at Ancestry.com; access the map at the bottom of the Ancestry.com search page and click on the location you're interested in to learn more.



MILITARY COLLECTION — to learn more about military service in both the U.S. and other countries; look for key records associated with the Revolutionary War, Civil War and all the way through to World War II and beyond, some of which mention land, give personal stories and information about other relatives.



MESSAGE BOARDS — to connect with other researchers who have experience researching German records.



FAMILY TREES — to link to other family members, possibly even distant cousins, who are also researching the same family lines; one of them may have the details you're searching for.

New York Passenger Lists, 1820-1957 about Luigi Ventura

Name: **Luigi Ventura**

Arrival Date: **8 Nov 1922**

Birth Year: **abt 1909**

Birth Location: **Italy**

Birth Location Other: **corato**

Age: **13**

Gender: **Male**

Ethnicity/Race-/Nationality: **Italian (South) (Italian)**

Port of Departure: **Naples, Italy**

Port of Arrival: **New York, New York**

Ship Name: **Colombo**

Search Ship: [Search the Colombo in the](#)

View Original Record

[View Passenger List](#)

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

Note the search result for Luigi provides his birthplace, arrival date and other details but page 2 (right) of the original passenger list record also states Luigi's destination in the U.S., health condition, physical description and more.

Arriving at Port of		NOV 8, 1922												19		143	
No.	Name	Age	Sex	Color of Hair	Color of Eyes	Height	Build	Complexion	Place of Birth	Country	City or Town	Occupation	Religion	Marital Status	Education	Profession	Remarks
1	Luigi Ventura	13	M	Brown	Blue	5' 0"	Slender	Fair	Italy	Italy	Corato	Student	Catholic	Single	None	None	Arrived from ship Colombo
2	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...

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.

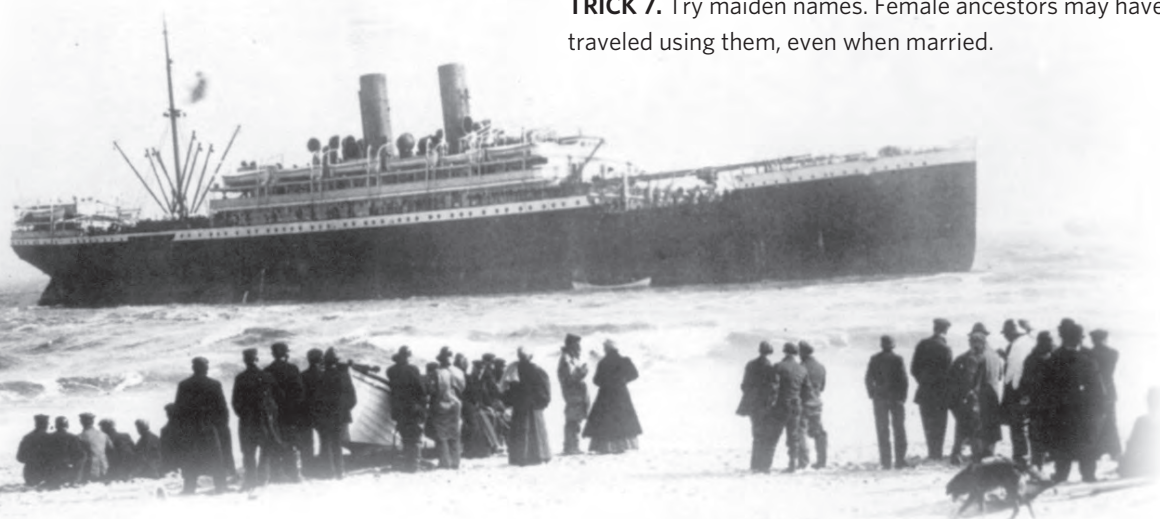
TRICK 3. Lengthen and shorten names. And remember that more than one ancestor may have changed a surname. Weisenberger, for example, may have originally been changed to Weisenberg before becoming Weisen and finally, generations later, Wise.

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.



Appendix: Finding the Hometown

Once you find your immigrant ancestor U.S. records, you'll also need to discover where he or she was from — region, county, or, better still, a hometown — so you know exactly where to focus your international search. Look in the following U.S. records for mentions of the old country home:



AT HOME

Search attics for mementos including wedding announcements, postcards and letters sent from the old country, any of which could give you names of relatives who remained behind, other family members and addresses that point you to a hometown.

IN THE CENSUS

Check birthplaces listed on census records. You may discover that the ancestor you thought was your family's first immigrant was actually the immigrant's child, cousin or in-law. Begin with 20th-century records and search for the whole family – parents, siblings and grandparents, too – and look for year of immigration in those same records. Can't find the immigrant? Keep working backwards and follow siblings as well. One of them may lead you directly to the immigrant.

HOME DATA			PERSONAL DESCRIPTION					EDUCATION		PLACE OF BIRTH		
Value of home, if owned, or of lot, if rented	Rents not	Does this family live on a farm?	Sex	Color of race	Age at last birthday	Marital condition	Age at first marriage	Attended school within any time since Sept. 1, 1919	Whether able to read and write	Place of birth of each person enumerated and of his or her parents. If born in the United States, give State or Territory. If of foreign birth, give country in which birthplace is now situated. (See Instructions.) Distinguish Canada-French from Canada-English, and Irish Free State from Northern Ireland		
										PERSON	FATHER	MOTHER
9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	
53.00	R	✓	M	W	57	M	42	10	Y	U.S. New York	NORTHERN Ireland	Pennsylvania
		✓	F	W	46	M	31	10	Y	U.S. Michigan	Wisconsin	Wisconsin
60.00	R	✓	M	F	70	M		10	Y	U.S. Pennsylvania	Austria	Austria
		✓	F	W	40	M		10	Y	U.S. Michigan	Austria	Austria

WITH FRIENDS AND RELATIVES

Ever notice how many people on a single page of a census seem to be born in the same country? It could be the result of chain migration. Often a single immigrant would arrive in America, land a job and send word of opportunity back home. Soon more family and friends would immigrate and send for their family and friends. For researchers, these ethnic enclaves can provide all manner of clues: maiden names, hometowns, extended family lines. Do a little digging and also check Member Connect to see who's researching the neighbors. They may have some details you're looking for, too.

ABOARD A SHIP. OR CROSSING A BORDER.

Immigration was already booming in the mid-19th century; unfortunately passenger lists were notoriously stingy with details then. But those mid-19th-century lists do hold

the names of other passengers, who may have been your ancestor's friends or relatives and fantastic record keepers. Snoop around their family lines, see where they went and if their paths crossed your ancestor's again. If you can't find a passenger list for your ancestor, consider that at times it was cheaper and simpler to travel to the U.S. via Canada. Your ancestor may have crossed the border immediately or even a generation or two later.

IN CHURCH

Baptisms, weddings, funerals and more took place in churches. Use census records and city directories to find your ancestor's address, then search for surviving churches near the family home. Contact the church to inquire about records created when your ancestor lived in the neighborhood. Also call the local library, which may know of other resources you haven't yet considered.

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

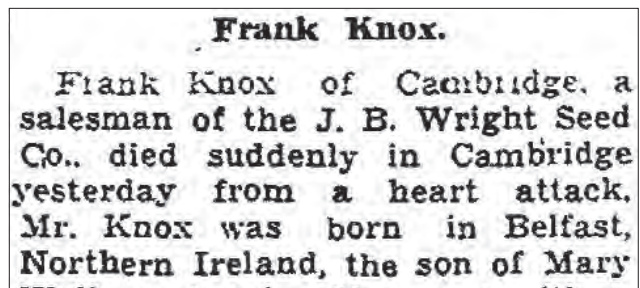
3	Date of birth	Nov 17, 1896
4	Place born	Ireland Irish
5	<input type="checkbox"/> I am <input type="checkbox"/> I have declared my intention <input type="checkbox"/> I am a citizen of the U.S.	
6	Place of birth of father	Ireland Irish
7	Name of employer	Interborough Rapid Transit Co
8	Place of residence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