

## Kip's Tips 2/8/2000 -

### Tips For Finding Your Immigrant Ancestors, Part 1

Between the year 1607 and the 1920s, it is estimated that over 30 million people immigrated to America. While finding the origins of your immigrant ancestors can be one of the most difficult aspects of family history research, it can also be one of the most rewarding. In this first installment of a two-part series, I will discuss how to get started on the trail of immigrant ancestors.

Your first step is to learn all that you can about your immigrants by searching for home sources and talking to the oldest members of your family. Are there birth, marriage, and death certificates, photographs, newspaper clippings, letters from their old country? With which church were they affiliated? Did they marry in America or in another country? Do probate records mention someone's residence in a foreign country? Are there diaries, church certificates, biographical sketches, newspaper obituaries, funeral cards, military records, or a family Bible? Gravestones sometimes show a birthplace or country of origin.

You may find immigration clues in the International Genealogical Index or Ancestral File [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org) and on compact discs at many libraries. Similar to the Ancestral File, the new Pedigree Resource File on compact disc may provide important clues. Family histories (genealogies), local histories, biographies, and other compiled sources may also provide clues to immigrant origins. You will want to search the Internet for genealogies, indexes, and immigration sources.

[Ancestry.com](http://Ancestry.com) indexes some major immigration reference sources, including Founders of New England, Morton Allen Directory of European Passenger Steamship Arrivals, New England Immigrants, 1700-1775, Pennsylvania German Pioneers, Wuerttemberg Emigration Index, and others.

**Immigration Sources** One of the first places to begin searching for your immigrant ancestors is in the federal census schedules. Although the 1850 U.S. census was the first to show the birthplace (state or country) of all people listed, the best approach would be to begin with the most recent census available, the 1920 census, and work backwards every ten years to 1850 (with the exception of the 1890 census which was mostly destroyed by fire). Census records, which are more complete in later years, give immigration information, and are more completely indexed.

Naturalization (citizenship) records may also prove useful. These records begin in the 1790s and include declaration of intentions and petitions for citizenship. They show information about the immigrant's arrival and place of origin. Two reference sources of interest are: *They Became Americans: Finding Naturalization Records and Ethnic Origins*, by Loretto Dennis Szucs, and *American Naturalization Records, 1790-1990*, by John J. Newman.

The largest collection of federal and local naturalization records in the country is on microfilm at the Family History Library in Salt Lake City (see the Family History Library Catalog for microfilm numbers). If needed, you can also write to the federal, state, or municipal court that issued the naturalization. For naturalization records after 1906, contact the nearest office of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, or write to the National Archives (National Archives and Records Administration, 700 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW Washington, DC 20408).

Passport applications may also be helpful in tracing immigrant origins. These records begin in 1795; the originals are available at the National Archives. Passports before 1930 are on microfilm at the Family

History Library and they are indexed.

Next time: More on the various sources that will help you track down your immigrant ancestors, along with a bibliography of essential printed sources on the topic.