Leaving Home and Becoming an American
Part One: Emigration/Immigration

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Emigration: Exiting, leaving; you emigrate from
Immigration: Coming into; you immigrate to

Why did people leave Europe?
1. Religious or ethnic persecution
2. Natural disasters
3. Famine
4. Economic problems
5. War/oppression/politics
6. Following others
7. Forced relocation
8. Primogeniture
9. Financial opportunity

It is important to learn the history of the country/countries from which your ancestors came to understand why they left and where they went.

Travel documents were not always required.
1. During early 19th century immigration, documents were not routinely checked.
2. By the mid-19th/20th century, when immigration reached its peak, all immigrants needed traveling papers.
3. However, in some locations they often were not reliable documents.
   a. They were easy to falsify.
   b. They were easy to purchase illegally.

How did emigrants get to port?
1. Early travelers used waterways, walked, or used carts or wagons.
2. With the growth of the railroad, many made it to port cities by train.
3. During the period of mass immigration, often the price of a ticket included a train ride across England.

What ports in Europe did most immigrants use?
Some of the larger ports were:

France: LeHavre

Belgium: Antwerp

The Netherlands: Rotterdam

Germany: Bremen, Hamburg

England: Portsmouth, Liverpool

Latvia: Libau (Liepaja)

Various ports in Ireland, Italy, Norway, Sweden, Finland, Russia, Estonia, and Poland

Just like today, port cities were chosen for ease of use, proximity, and fare. If the cheaper ticket meant stopping at other ports or traveling between ports via train, that was often the choice.

Hamburg Emigration Lists, 1850–1934

These are indexed and are online at Ancestry.com. The microfilms are also at the Family History Library in Salt Lake City. The pages are in German, but there are good finding aids, and they are written in modern German script, not the old fashioned kind.

Prior to 1910, search for both direct and indirect crossings. Direct meant one ship the whole way; indirect usually meant a stop on the east coast of England, transportation across the country, and a departure from Liverpool to the U.S.

- The lists are in loose alphabetical order.
- Be sure to check for continued pages wherever there was room, and in no particular order.
- When you find your person, be sure to look at the actual manifest. Add sufficient time (at least ten days to two weeks) to find him/her in the American arrivals.

Additional German Records

Melde Records: German police kept records of residence starting in the 1840s. If you were moving, you were supposed to notify the local registration office. To use these records, you need to know the town and the approximate date your person lived there. Available at the Family History Library on microfilm.

Württemberg Emigration Records and Index

First published as a multi-volume book, this index can now be searched online on a number of sites. Covers 1808–1890 but only includes those people who had legal permission to emigrate from Württemberg. The books are organized by *Oberamt* (district). Index includes name, birth date and place, district, application date, destination, and a Family History Library film number. Complete emigration is on the microfilms, which are copies of emigration application records. Learn more on the FamilySearch wiki or on *German Roots*. (See Reference List)

Additional English Records

English departure records from 1890–1960 are on *Findmypast.com*/.

The Ships

The earliest vessels carrying immigrants were sailing ships. The voyage to the U.S. could take months, depending on where they started and the time of the year. By the mid-nineteenth century, steam/sail combinations were common until steamships finally replaced them.

Arrival in the U.S.

During the early years of our country, there were about 101 ports open for immigrant arrivals. Although most immigrants arrived at the larger ports of Baltimore, Philadelphia, Boston, and New York, they could have come through New Orleans, Galveston, San Francisco, or even Canada. Be open to searching all ports for your immigrant.

- Castle Garden in New York was the first formal immigration station; it opened in 1855.
- Ellis Island was the first **federal** processing center; it opened in 1892.

Immigration did not become a nationwide federal function until late September 1906. Early manifests exist and are found in book form, on microfilm, and online. They typically contain a minimum of information. Manifests after September 1906 are well worth seeking, as they do provide much-needed genealogical information. They are online in several locations and they have been microfilmed.

Remember:

1. Your ancestor likely arrived with his/her original European name.

2. He/she may or may not have had legitimate travel documents.

3. You need to know as much as you can about your immigrant before starting.

4. *You need to do all possible American research first.*

5. Young people did travel alone, sometimes lying about their age.

6. Spelling errors are very common on manifests, as are errors in gender, etc.

7. Names were copied from travel documents in Europe and were **NOT** changed by immigration officials, *no matter what your family story says*.

Some Recommended References/Websites

Ballinstadt, the Emigration Museum Hamburg (https://www.ballinstadt.de/?lang=en) Website of the emigration museum in Hamburg, Germany. Site is in English. This interesting museum opened in 2007.

Colletta, John P. *They Came in Ships: A Guide to Finding Your Immigrant Ancestor's Arrival Record*. 3rd edition. Orem, Utah: Ancestry Publishing Co., 2002. (This is the granddaddy of immigration books and still among the most helpful guides on immigration research.)

Cyndi's List: Ships and Passenger Lists (https://www.cyndislist.com/ships) Lists of links to websites with information about ocean-going ships. Also look on the site for immigration websites.

"German Genealogy: German Emigration Records," *Genealoger Family History and Genealogy Services* (https://www.genealoger.com/german/german_genealogy.htm) Extensive list of published and online sources for German emigration as well as historical information.

Glazier, Ira A. and P. William Filby. *Germans to America*. Wilmington, Delaware: Scholarly Resources, 1988–. Glazier and Filby also have a series of *Italians to America* and *Russians to America* as well as additional passenger ships lists. These are widely available.

"Germany Emigration and Immigration," *FamilySearch.org* (https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Germany_Emigration_and_Immigration). Excellent article on German emigration/immigration with links to websites and an extensive bibliography. Also information on Alsace-Lorraine, (both French and German over time); Russian/German, and Austrian records.

"Hamburg Emigration Lists," *FamilySearch.org* (https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Hamburg_Passenger_Lists) Step by step help in using these records plus clickable links to many of the files.

Immigrant Ships Transcribers Guild (https://www.immigrantships.net) More than 17,000 passenger manifests, plus many additional links, all done by volunteers.

"Ireland Emigration and Immigration," *FamilySearch.org* (https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Ireland_Emigration_and_Immigration) Extensive article with dozens of links to websites and records. Includes Australia, New Zealand, and English records as well.

"Jewish Emigration and Immigration," *FamilySearch.org* (https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Jewish_Emigration_and_Immigration) Many links on this page, also, to other information about Jewish genealogy.

"Immigrant Records at the National Archives," *National Archives and Records Administration (NARA)*, (https://www.archives.gov/research/immigration) Links to both immigration and naturalization records available at the National Archives.

"Online German Emigration Records, Lists and Indexes," *German Roots/German Genealogy*, (https://www.germanroots.com/emigration.html) Maintained by genealogist, Joe Beine, this is a treasure trove of German genealogy resources, annotated, populated with active links, and divided by locale.

The Ships List (http://www.theshipslist.com/) Learn more about the ships that might have brought your ancestors overseas plus explore dozens of early passenger lists. Last copyright update in 2019.

"United States Passports," *FamilySearch.org* (https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/United_States_Passports) Comprehensive history of passports, mostly as they pertain to the U.S., with online links, where appropriate.