

# **The Path from Passenger Lists to Naturalization Records**

## **Part 2: Immigration and Naturalization**

**Kathryn Miller Marshall, Ph.D.**

**4kmmarshall@gmail.com**

**DOCUMENTING THE JOURNEY.** Three official documents recorded an ancestor's arrival in North America. Each played a role in establishing a person's eligibility to become a citizen of the United States. Ship passenger lists have been used by the US government to verify the date of arrival in this country for immigrants who were applying for citizenship. Declarations of the Passenger hold genealogical gold mines. Numbered Certificates of Arrival have confirmed to local county courts that the naturalization process could proceed, and counteracted identity theft.

- **Passenger list or ship manifest**
- **Declaration of Passenger**
- **Certificate of Arrival**

See the FamilySearch Wiki article on US Immigration Ship Arrival Records found at [https://familysearch.org/learn/wiki/en/US\\_Immigration\\_Ship\\_%28Vessel%29\\_Arrival\\_Records](https://familysearch.org/learn/wiki/en/US_Immigration_Ship_%28Vessel%29_Arrival_Records)

At the peak of immigration between 1820 and 1920, the major ports in the US were New York, Boston, Baltimore, Philadelphia, and New Orleans (used widely by those migrating to the Midwest). There are few immigration lists before 1820, but Custom Houses routinely collected passenger lists between 1820-1891. Prior to 1893, the town of residence in an immigrant's country of origin was rarely recorded. After 1893, records associated with voyages may show an immigrant's previous residence, address of nearest relative, and where they were planning to move. Ships' passenger lists are readily available from 1891 to 1954.

Upon arrival in an American port, a passenger could be admitted to the country, detained for medical reasons or until family or friends appeared to guarantee financial support/employment for the immigrant, or be deported. The immigrant's experience and evaluation by authorities at the port of entry were recorded. For an excellent description of ship manifest markings, see "A Guide to Interpreting Passenger List Annotations" at

<http://www.jewishgen.org/InfoFiles/Manifests/>.

See also <http://www.jewishgen.org/infofiles/#Immigration>.

"During Ellis Island's peak years, unmarried immigrant women faced extra scrutiny when entering the United States. Women who traveled with companions to whom they were not married were deemed susceptible to "immoral" activities. Single women who traveled alone and had no relatives to meet them were often seen as "likely to become a public charge." If the women married, however, they became admissible immigrants. As a result, hundreds of immigrants were married on Ellis Island." "Married at Ellis Island: Single Women and Immigration, 1892-1924." US Citizenship and Immigration Services Webinar, March 27, 2017.

## **IMMIGRATION AND NATURALIZATION**

Naturalization is "the process of granting citizenship privileges and responsibilities to

foreign-born residents.” The documents generated are **useful for genealogical research** since they contain statements of the **immigrant's national origin, foreign and “Americanized” names, residence, and date of arrival**. More information was recorded after the establishment of the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) in **1906**, when naturalization records began showing the **immigrant’s birth date and place, even details about the immigrant’s family**.

To become a naturalized citizen, an individual had to demonstrate **residency** for a specified period of time, **good moral character**, and swear an **oath of loyalty or allegiance**. Although immigrants were never required to apply for citizenship, if they chose to do so, **proof of the date of arrival** in the United States was needed. This date was officially established through **ship manifests or passenger records**. Additionally, two years had to pass from the time that an immigrant filed a **Declaration of Intention** to become a citizen (also known as **“First Papers”**) until citizenship would be granted. If an immigrant moved from state to state, the clock was re-started to qualify for citizenship. Residency requirements included not only years in the United States, but also stable residency within a given state for a period of time.

Before 1790, a British citizen was automatically a British citizen in any colony of the British empire, so our early colonial ancestors did not generate “naturalization” records. Immigrants to the colonies from other countries renounced allegiance to their former sovereign, gave oaths of allegiance to the crown, or later to the United States of America. Immigrants appeared before a civil authority to request citizenship. Foreign residents without rights of citizenship were called denizens. Obtaining legal status under British law was termed denization.

After 1790, citizenship required a minimum of two years residency in the US and one year in the state. Each state had its own residency requirements until 1906. From 1802 to 1868, the residency requirement was five years in the US and one year in the state. The **Declaration of Intention had to be filed at least two years before the “Final Papers”** or petition could be filed. In 1868, American citizenship was automatically granted to all African Americans born in the United States or naturalized. No applications were required. In 1906, the Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization was created to standardize laws and procedures. From 1906 to present, the standard has remained five years in the US plus one year of residency within a given state. In 1924, American citizenship was automatically granted to all Native Americans.

Many people who filed an initial **Declaration of Intention** to become a citizen did not complete the process, but their First Papers would still be on file at the county court. Censuses, military records, court minutes, homestead records, passports, and voting registers may provide evidence that an immigrant obtained citizenship.

The naturalization process was handled by the courts, with the actual paper trail as follows. When a Declaration/Petition was **submitted to a court**, a **copy** of the Declaration/Petition **went from the court to the US Immigration Service**. The Immigration Service **checked the specified ship manifest to verify the immigrant's claimed port/date/ship of arrival**. When found, the Immigration Service would **certify information** from the passenger manifest on a form called the **Certificate of Arrival**, and **mail it back to the court** in order to satisfy the court that the applicant met the **admission and residency requirements** for naturalization. The number of the Certificate of Arrival is written on the original passenger list in the possession of

federal offices. Certificates were not given to the immigrant, but were **filed with court records**. Copies of the certificates were **not kept by the INS**, since they had the **passenger list** itself.

The Basic Naturalization Act of 1906 mandated **Certificates of Arrival**. They began appearing in court naturalization records five years later, hence around 1911. The 1906 law required that **immigrants arriving after June 29, 1906 had to have been legally admitted** in order to apply for citizenship.

With the **Declaration of Intention or “First Papers,”** an immigrant renounced allegiance to foreign governments and established a start date to prove fulfillment of residency requirements. These papers were filed in many places -- a court at a port of arrival, en route to a new home, or in the immigrant’s new home. Check court records.

After fulfilling the residency requirement of 2-5 years, the immigrant was eligible to file a petition for citizenship. The **Petition, “Second Papers,” or “Final Papers”** were generally filed in the court nearest the immigrant’s place of residence. When requirements were completed, the immigrant was sworn in and issued the **Naturalization Certificate**. This certificate would be found in the family’s possessions.

US citizenship has been granted through:

- **Personal application** after meeting allegiance, residency, and character requirements.
- **Military service** with expedited paperwork. Other requirements waived.
- **Family relationship**
- **Federal legislation** on behalf of a specified group.

### **Derivative Citizenship**

1855-1922	A woman’s citizenship was derived from her husband’s citizenship status. A woman born in the USA lost her US citizenship if she married a foreigner, and had to be naturalized to become a citizen again. An alien woman who married a United States citizen became a United States citizen.
Until 1906	Immigrants under the age of 21 whose parents did not naturalize could be naturalized without filing a declaration of intent after they reached the age of 21 and had met the residency requirements.
Until 1922	Wives of citizens automatically became citizens when their husbands became citizens.
Until 1940	Children under 21 years of age automatically became citizens when their father became a citizen.

**US Federal Censuses** provide the following information about arrivals and citizenship

1820-1840	Number of foreigners in household
1850-1940	Place of birth
1870	Male citizens 21 years of age
1880-1940	Place of birth of father and mother
1900-1930	Year of immigration and number of years in the US
1910-1920	Native tongue of respondent and parents in 1920
1900-1940	If naturalized, indicated as NA (naturalized), PA (Declaration of Intention)

1940 papers filed), or AL (alien); and year of Naturalization  
Place of residence in 1935

Other places to seek immigrant origins include the following.

- **Vital records** may list place of birth. Check marriage and death records. Check records for all children.
- **Obituaries** in the US began in the late 1800s and early 1900s. An increasing number are available online, thanks to efforts such as the FamilySearch Obituary Project now under way. Many newspapers are on microfilm. Check the FamilySearch Catalog by location or public libraries for the local area.
- **Church records** may list place of birth. Check marriage and burial records. Check records for all children's baptism, marriage, burial, and confirmation records. Generally, confirmation was performed around age 14. If baptized in one place and confirmed in another, the confirmation record was supposed to show where the baptism had taken place.
- **County histories** were written in the late 1800s, particularly in the 1870-1880s, generally about prominent local people.
- **Military records** may contain birth information. Twentieth century military records are more likely to provide the town of birth. Search enlistment records, pension records, draft registration cards, discharge records, and personnel files. If a man voluntarily enlisted, there would be no draft record. Don't overlook the "Old Man's Draft" of men age 45-65 in 1942.
- Settlers came in groups, often sending out a scout. "**Chain migration**" occurred as the family could afford it. Ethnic groups and religious groups generally settled together, often **naming their settlements after their home town**.

**Border crossing lists** provide the names of aliens crossing the border, listed monthly by train, alphabetically by port, then by railway. Border crossing indexes are often the only record of the crossing. See Canadian Border Crossings (1854-1954): Manifests of Passengers arriving in the St. Albans, Vermont District. These are records from all over Canada and northern USA; all Canadian seaports and emigration stations; ship manifests, passenger lists of those bound to the US via Canada; and US train arrival stations in all border states from Washington to Maine.

See the FamilySearch Wiki for an article on border crossings from Mexico by plane or overland.  
[https://familysearch.org/wiki/en/United\\_States\\_Border\\_Crossings\\_from\\_Mexico\\_to\\_United\\_States\\_\(FamilySearch\\_Historical\\_Records\)](https://familysearch.org/wiki/en/United_States_Border_Crossings_from_Mexico_to_United_States_(FamilySearch_Historical_Records))