



FOLLOW THE RECORDS AND SEE WHERE THEY GO!

Presented by Kate Townsend

www.familyhistoryinvestigations.com • kate@familyhistoryinvestigations.com

The more you do genealogical research, the more you notice that one record can lead you to another. It is essential to always look for clues within records so that you can “follow” them. This can help make your research comprehensive. This lecture is meant to provide ideas through examples of how to apply this principle to your own family trees.

Here are some examples of how you can “follow the records” in some common genealogical resources:

PASSENGERS LISTS

Scroll Over for More Information

Always remember to scroll to the next page when viewing a passenger list; there might be more information on the following page. The information found on the following page might not have your ancestor’s name attached to it. The number next to their name on the page where you identified the hit might be all you identify on the following page. However, this information still pertains to them and can be valuable.

Notation on Passenger Lists with Meaning

If you’re looking at a passenger list for a ship arriving in New York City after 1893, look for the following notations:

- S.I.
- X
- B.S.I.
- Held
- In Hospital

If you find one of these notations next to your ancestor's name, scroll to the end of the manifest as it appears on microfilm or in a database. You should find additional information in the form of one or two of the following:

- Record of Detained Alien Passengers
- Record of Aliens Held for Special Inquiry

Additional details on the reason why your ancestor was detained and/or held at the arrival port might be located within.

Incoming and Outgoing Passenger Lists

If you can find a passenger coming into the United States, you might be able to find them leaving their port of departure. Meaning, if you see your ancestor traveling from Liverpool to New York City in 1903, you can try to find a UK outgoing passenger list to show the first part of their journey.

Alternatively, you might find a record of someone leaving a port of departure, but you can't find them coming into the United States. Passenger list records are not comprehensive, so this is more common than you might think. Therefore, it is best to search for your ancestors in any available avenue to find them in the records.

Examples of some of the databases for ports of departure are as follows:

- [Hamburg Passenger Lists, 1850-1934](#) on Ancestry.com
- [U.S. Passenger and Crew Lists for U.S. Bound Vessels Arriving in Canada, 1912-1939 and 1953-1962](#) on Ancestry.com
- [UK and Ireland, Incoming Passenger Lists, 1878-1960](#) on Ancestry.com
- [UK and Ireland, Outward Passenger Lists, 1890-1960](#) on Ancestry.com

NATURALIZATION

Declaration of Intention and Petition for Naturalization

From 1795 to 1956, when an immigrant ancestor naturalized (with a few exceptions) two pieces of documentation needed to be filed with a court: the declaration of intention (otherwise known as first papers) and the petition for naturalization. Prior to 1906, these two pieces of documentation could be filed in any court in the United States (i.e., ranging from a small lower court to a federal court). In turn, the pieces of documentation did not have to be filed in the same court as one another. After 1906, the documentation was "supposed" to be exclusively filed in federal court. However, this rule was not always followed. Therefore, it can sometimes

2

Copyright Kate Townsend, 2023. All rights reserved.

Please contact the author for sharing permission at kate@familyhistoryinvestigations.com.

be difficult to track down this documentation for your ancestors, but it is also worth the effort.

USCIS Genealogy Program

If you have 20th-century ancestors in your family who naturalized after 1906, you might be in luck. The [USCIS Genealogy Program](#) can help you obtain additional information on these ancestors. The program costs \$65.00 per record search but can provide helpful information.

The first step to using the program is to request an “index search request” on your 20th-century immigrant ancestors to see what file number(s) the USCIS Genealogy program maintains for an ancestor. A file number might have been created for any number of reasons including if your ancestor naturalized as a United States citizen or if they needed to register as an alien after the Alien Registration Act was passed in 1940. You want to find those file numbers! The file numbers will lead you to more information about your ancestor

For example, you can utilize the “C Number” identified on a petition for naturalization or from the index search with the USCIS Genealogy Program to obtain a copy of your ancestor’s Certificate of Naturalization. The Certificate of Naturalization is the document that your ancestor was given to your ancestor by the court to serve as documentation that they were naturalized. Only individuals who naturalized from September 1906 to September 1956 received a “C Number.” The Certificate of Naturalization can be helpful because it might have a photograph of your ancestor on it.

The “C Number” is typically found on the last page of a petition for naturalization for those records filed between September 1906 to September 1956.

OATH OF ALLEGIANCE

I hereby declare, on oath, that I absolutely and entirely renounce and abjure all allegiance and fidelity to any foreign prince, potentate, state, or sovereignty of whom or which I have heretofore been a subject or citizen; that I will support and defend the Constitution and laws of the United States of America against all enemies, foreign and domestic; that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same; and that I take this obligation freely without any mental reservation or purpose of evasion: SO HELP ME GOD. In acknowledgment whereof I have heretofore affixed my signature.

Dr. Huber Kacaw
(Signature of petitioner)

Sworn to in open court, this 21st day of August A. D. 1941

John H. McKeen
Clerk.

Margaret Banks
Deputy Clerk.

NOTE.—In renunciation of title or order of nobility, add the following to the oath of allegiance before it is signed: "I further renounce the title of (give title or titles) which I have heretofore held," or "I further renounce the order of nobility (give the order of nobility) in which I have heretofore belonged."

Petition granted: Line No. 11 of List No. 129 and Certificate No. 5217927 issued.

Petition denied: List No. _____

Petition continued from _____ to _____ Reason _____

U. S. GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE 16-10120

If you receive an “index search request” back with index numbers for your ancestor, make sure that you request the records from USCIS themselves. The bulk of information that you want on your ancestors will come from these requests.

CRIMINAL AND CIVIL RECORDS

If you see a reference to a criminal or civil record somewhere, try to find the original court documents. Often you will do this by either contacting or going to the courthouse directly in the jurisdiction where the case occurred if the case was filed on the state level. If the case was filed federally, the court documents will likely be at a regional National Archives branch. It might take a little digging to find out where the documents would be if they are extant, but it can be well worth the effort.

Criminal Example: You identify a reference to someone being arrested and/or imprisoned in a newspaper. As a result, you contact the local courthouse where the offense occurred. You provide the names of the involved parties and the date to obtain the original criminal docket and/or court documents.

Civil Example: You find a reference to a civil suit for an ancestor in a family history book or newspaper. Like the criminal example, you contact the local courthouse where the case was filed. You provide the names of the involved parties and the date to obtain the original case docket and/or court documents.

DEATH CERTIFICATES

Always check out the following when you find a death certificate: the funeral home name, the location of death, and the burial location. There is more information on a death certification than just that can be used to substantiate a relationship (i.e., finding someone’s parents’ names).

Where the Death Occurred

For example, utilize the information about where the death occurred. You might find out that an ancestor died in a state institution or another location that might have records. Try to see if you can get access to these records if you notice anything “unusual.” Reaching out to a local librarian and/or archivist can be a good place to start if you notice something that you think could point to more records.

The Funeral Home

If you have the name of the funeral home, try to see if you can get records from the funeral home if it is still in operation. Additionally, sometimes funeral home records end up in a repository like a local university or historical society. Check to see if the funeral home records exist and try to obtain them.

CEMETERY RECORDS

Cemetery research is not just exclusive to FindAGrave.com. Go to a cemetery to understand the spatial relationships between the deceased. Contact the cemetery for more information because sometimes they have details that are not obvious on headstones. In addition, cemeteries will often maintain records for individuals without headstones. Go to the original source and try to see if you can get more details.

FIND THE ORIGINAL

Make sure you find and look for the original record when you identify indexes online, records that are transcribed, or an abstract of an original document. There can always be mistakes with these sorts of sources. It is best to see the original yourself to make your own determination of the text. If you can request it, do so!

GET CREATIVE!

A genealogical record can be anything if it pertains to your ancestors. Don't just limit your search to traditional records. If you see something like there was a coroner's investigation into an ancestor's death, see if you can get a copy of the coroner's report. Even if you can't, it's always worth trying.