

Tracing Immigrant Origins

INTRODUCTION

This outline introduces the principles, search strategies, and various record types you can use to identify an immigrant ancestor's original hometown. These principles can be applied to almost any country. If you are just beginning your research, you may need additional information about genealogical records and search strategies.

Finding an immigrant ancestor's place of origin is the key to finding earlier generations of the family. It provides access to many family history resources in that home area. Once you know a former place of residence or a birthplace, you may be able to add more generations to your pedigree. Learning about your family's history and experiences can be a source of enjoyment and education for you and your family.

Tracing immigrant origins can be one of the hardest parts of family history research. Even if you know which country your family came from, it can still be hard to identify a specific hometown or birthplace.

Using This Outline

This outline is a reference tool. It has several features to help you learn about sources and strategies to find an immigrant's hometown.

- Arrangement*. This outline is divided into three main parts. You may use these parts separately or together. "Part 1. Search Strategies" describes the five basic steps you can use to find an immigrant's place of origin. "Part 2. Country of Arrival" describes tactics and record types for records created in the immigrant's new country. "Part 3. Country of Origin" describes the tactics and record types from his or her homeland.

- Records Selection Table s*. Both part two (Country-of-Arrival) and part three (Country-of-Origin) have a "Records Selection Table." These tables can help you choose the *record type* that might contain the information you need. The search tactics are listed in an order that best helps you if you know little about the immigrant. Select the tactic(s) and record type(s) that best fit what you already know.

- Research Sequence*. The best approach is usually to start searching records created in the immigrant's new country, especially if you know little about the immigrant. For a few countries, it is easier to use country-of-origin records. This outline usually identifies such countries. To verify information found in country-of-arrival records, use country-of-origin records.

- Other Research Outlines*. This research outline is most helpful when used with other available research outlines. These outlines tell you what information is in each record type and the availability of records for specific countries. State and provincial outlines can also help. Research outlines are available at family history centers or the Family History Library.

Family History Library Catalog

The **Family History Library** has most of the records mentioned in this outline. The key to finding a record in the Family History Library's collection is the Family History Library Catalog. The catalog describes the library's records and provides the call numbers. Copies of the catalog on microfiche are at the Family History Library and at each family history center. At the library and at most centers you can also search the catalog on computer.

The Family History Library Catalog has four major sections:

- Locality
- Surname
- Subject
- Author/Title

To find the call numbers of the records described in this outline, you will most often use the Locality section. *The paragraph headings in this outline* that describe types of records, such as “Church Records,” are the same as the topics found in the Locality section of the Family History Library Catalog.

Catalog entries are generally written in the same language as the records they describe. However, the description also includes a brief English summary of the contents.

The Locality section lists records by area. Records relating to an entire country, such as [passenger lists](#), are listed under the country name. Most records are listed under the specific place. For example, in the Locality section look for—

- The *place* where your ancestor lived, such as—

UNITED STATES

OHIO

OHIO, HAMILTON

OHIO, HAMILTON, CINCINNATI

- The *record type* you want to search, such as—

UNITED STATES - CENSUS

OHIO - GENEALOGY

OHIO, HAMILTON - NATURALIZATION AND CITIZENSHIP

OHIO, HAMILTON, CINCINNATI - CHURCH RECORDS

PART 1. SEARCH STRATEGIES

Successful researchers follow a series of steps as they conduct research. This section describes the steps to take to find an immigrant's place of origin.

Step 1. Identify What You Know about the Immigrant To successfully determine an immigrant's place of origin, you need to learn some minimum facts about him or her. This will help you select record types to search and identify the immigrant in those records. Additional information can also be helpful.

Minimum Identification. Before trying to find an immigrant's place of origin, be sure you have learned as much of the following as possible:

The immigrant's name. Find both the given names and surname (last name), including middle names (such as Johann Friedrich Wolfgang Sticht). Try to learn the name used in the country of origin and any variations of it.

A date. A birth date is most preferable, but if you cannot find one, use a marriage, confirmation, baptismal, or military release date, or another date of an event that happened in the country of origin. Try to find an entire date (day, month, and year), but you may be able to identify the immigrant with an approximate year.

A place. Learn as much as you can about where the immigrant came from, such as the province, county, or region. Knowing as specific a place as possible helps you distinguish between the immigrant and others of the same name. Eventually, you will have to learn the specific town where the immigrant came from. Use this outline to learn this information.

A relative. Learning the name of a relative of the immigrant, such as the father, helps you identify your ancestor in country-of-origin records. If you cannot learn the father's name, try to learn the name of the mother, spouse, brother, sister, or other close relative (such as an aunt or uncle).

Additional Information. While minimum identification helps you recognize your ancestor in country-of-origin records, additional information could provide clues to the place of origin or confirm that you have found the right family. If possible, learn the following about the immigrant:

Other family members. Learn about both parents, his or her spouse, all brothers and sisters, and any children. This information helps you identify him or her in native records. Also, you may discover the place of origin by finding a relative's place of origin.

Friends and neighbors. Many immigrants traveled in groups or settled among friends from their native lands. Searching for friends or neighbors might reveal an immigrant's place of origin.

Version of Data: 6/9/2001]

Family stories and traditions. While many family traditions are exaggerated (such as those about stowaways), they may include accurate facts. Such things as the area of the country he or she came from, the industry in the native district, occupations, nearby towns, rivers, mountains, or other features could provide clues to the place of origin.

Religion. Religious groups in many countries create records. By learning the immigrant's religion, you can further identify him or her, determine others he or she may have traveled with, limit your searches to the records most likely to contain useful information, and gain clues to the region where he or she lived. For example, a Protestant Irishman most likely came from northern Ireland, not central or southern Ireland.

Step 2. Decide What You Want to Learn

Select an immigrant you want to learn about. Choose one for whom you have minimum identification. It helps to know where the immigrant lived in the country of arrival and any names used there (such as a woman's married name).

Choose one of the goals discussed below. Then use the appropriate "Records Selection Table" to select records that might contain that information.

Primary Goal. The primary goal is to find the immigrant's place of origin. With the place of origin you can begin using records from the hometown to extend the immigrant's ancestry or pursue other research goals. If you do not yet have enough information to find the place of origin, choose one of the secondary goals below.

Secondary Goals. Other information about an immigrant is often helpful when searching for a place of origin. Even records that say nothing about the place of origin may give clues leading to records that name the hometown. One clue can lead to another until you find a record showing the town of origin.

Possible secondary goals include—

Date of immigration. An immigration date leads to passenger lists and other records. With the immigration date, you can also figure out when the immigrant first appears in other records in the new country, when he was released from the military in the old country, or when he or she applied for citizenship.

Place of departure. Knowing where an immigrant left from may help you find departure lists and indexes, the ship's name, and newspaper and police lists.

Place of arrival. Immigrants often stayed in the port of arrival for months or years before moving on. In such cases, you can search naturalization, church, and vital records in that location.

Ship's name and related data. The name of the ship a person traveled on will help you use passenger lists or find the names of other immigrants in the group.

Names of other immigrants in the group. Immigrants often traveled in groups or with relatives. They often settled close to people they knew in the old country. If you cannot find a person's place of origin, learn about relatives, neighbors, fellow passengers, or a minister who may have immigrated from the same hometown.

Immigrant's original country or region. Sometimes knowing the country or region a person left from lets you begin searching the records of that area. It may also imply the place of departure.

Immigrant's name before immigrating. This helps identify a person in country-of-origin records. Sometimes the name, or part of one, is a clue to the immigrant's original country or region.

Step 3: Select the Records to Search

This outline can help you evaluate the content, availability, ease of use, time period covered, and reliability of records. It can also indicate if your ancestor is likely to be listed. For information on a specific country, see the appropriate national research outline.

It is almost always best to first search the sources in the country where the immigrant finally settled.

Do not switch to records from the country-of-origin too soon in your search. You will most likely find the immigrant's birthplace or hometown in country-of-arrival records, which are usually easier to use.

Genealogical Records The genealogical and historical records needed to determine an immigrant's place of origin fall into two categories:

Compiled Records. Someone else may have already researched the immigrant. This is especially true if the person immigrated before about 1800. Compiled records include—

Printed family histories and genealogies.

Family information published in periodicals and newsletters.

Biographies.

Local histories.

Manuscript collections of family information.

Databases of family information (such as FamilySearch™ and the Family Group Records Collections).

Hereditary and lineage society records.

Many records containing previous research are described in the “Biography,” “Genealogy,” “History,” “Periodicals,” and “Societies” sections of part two and part three. Use such sources carefully because the information is secondary and may contain some inaccuracies.

Original Records. After searching compiled records, search the existing records of—
Each place where the immigrant lived.

The complete time period when he or she lived there.

All jurisdictions that may have kept records about him or her (town, church, county, state, and federal).

Most record types described in this outline are original records, such as “Church Records,” “Emigration and Immigration,” “Naturalization,” or “Vital Records.”

Reference Tools If you do not have enough information to select or use compiled or original records, use reference tools from the following categories:

Background Information. You may need some geographical, linguistic, historical, or cultural information. This information can save you time and effort by helping you focus your research in the correct place and time period. You may need to—

Locate towns or places.

Review local or ethnic histories.

Learn about jurisdictions.

Use language helps.

Understand native customs.

Background information sources are not discussed in this outline, but they are discussed in the national research outlines. Some are also listed in the “For Further Reading” section of this outline.

Finding Aids. Catalogs or bibliographies identify where a record is available. Indexes help find the person's name in a record. A few finding aids are discussed in this outline. See the appropriate national research outline for more information on finding aids.

Step 4. Find and Search the Records

Suggestions for Obtaining Records . You may be able to obtain the records you need from the following:

Family History Library. You are welcome to visit and use the records at the Family History Library. The library is open to the public. There are no fees for using the records.

Family History Centers. Copies of most of the records on microform at the Family History Library can be loaned to family history centers. There are small duplication and postage fees for this service. You can get a list of the family history centers near you by writing to the Family History Library.

Archives and local churches. Most original documents are at federal, state, church, and local archives or in local parish offices. While the Family History Library has many records on microfilm, additional records are available only at these archives. You can request searches in their records through correspondence or by visiting these offices.

Libraries and interlibrary loan. Public, academic, and other research libraries may have compiled records and some original records for tracing immigrant origins. Some libraries provide interlibrary loan services to borrow records from other libraries. In addition, many indexes and catalogs are available through local libraries.

Professional researchers. You can hire a professional researcher to search the records for you. Researchers in the country of origin may keep lists of emigrants compiled from various sources. For information on hiring a researcher, see [*Hiring a Professional Genealogist*](#). When requesting services from libraries or professional researchers through correspondence, you will have more success if your letter is brief and specific. Enclose a self-addressed, stamped envelope when writing within your own country. When writing to other countries, enclose international reply coupons (available from your post office). You usually need to send a check or money order in advance to pay for photocopy or search services.

Suggestions for Searching the Records. Follow these principles as you search the various records for your ancestor:

Search for the immigrant's entire family. The records of each person in a family may include clues for identifying other family members. Look at other records and in other places to find a missing family member. Other people with the same surname may be relatives.

Search each source thoroughly. Note the immigrant's occupation and the names of witnesses, godparents, neighbors, relatives, guardians, and others.

Search a broad time period. Look several years before and after the date you think an event occurred.

Use indexes. Many records have indexes that help you use the records faster and better. However, many indexes are incomplete. They may only include the name of the specific person the record is about. They may not include parents, witnesses, and other incidental persons. Also, the original records may have been misinterpreted, or names may have been omitted during indexing.

Search for previous residences. Information about previous residences can lead to additional records that may have more information.

Watch for spelling variations. Spelling was not standardized when most early records were made. You may find a name spelled differently than it is today.

Step 5. Use the Information

After you find information about an immigrant's place of origin, you must interpret your findings. You may want to ask an experienced researcher or native speaker to help you understand foreign terms.

You should—

Evaluate the place-name.

Understand foreign spellings.

Prove that the person you found is really the immigrant.

Place-Names. Use gazetteers and other reference tools to evaluate the information. Watch for the following problems:

Language and terminology. If you do not know the native version of a country name, you may think the country name is a town. For example—

Native Name

Deutschland

Sverige

Cechy

Eire English Translation

Germany

Sweden

Bohemia

Republic of Ireland

Other foreign terms can be mistaken for place-names. “*Königreich Preußen*,” for example, means the “kingdom of Prussia” and does not refer to a town called *Königreich* in Prussia. Other foreign terms that may confuse researchers include—

Native Term

Kreis

Powiat

Megye

Socken English Translation

district (German)

district (Polish)

county (Hungarian)

parish (Swedish)

Many town names are spelled differently in the native language:

Native Spelling

Anvers

Napoli

München

Plzen

København

Wien English Translation

Antwerp

Naples

Munich

Pilsen

Copenhagen

Vienna

***State, regional, and provincial names.* Instead of the town, some sources only name the county, region, or province. Foreign states, counties, provinces, or regions are unfamiliar to many researchers. Some examples include—**

Native Term

Sachsen

Mazuria

East Anglia

Hunsruck

Holland English Translation

Saxony

Northeastern Poland

Eastern coastal region in England

Mountain range in western Germany

Provinces in the Netherlands

***Cities and counties with the same name.* Often the name you find is both a city and a province or county name. In most records, names such as *Baden, Hannover, Luxembourg, Posen, or York* probably refer to a county or state, not a city or town.**

Nearby large city. If you find the name of a large or well-known city in a record, the ancestor is often *not* from the city itself but rather from a smaller, lesser-known place nearby. For example, many immigrants said they came from London or Berlin when they really came from towns near London or Berlin. However, some immigrants did live in a large city for a period of time before emigrating.

If the immigrant is said to have come from a large city, look for clues that he or she really came from a nearby town. A person from a large city should not have an occupation associated with small town life, such as farming. Family traditions about trips to the market or traveling several miles to church are also clues that the immigrant came from a small town. **Port cities.** Sometimes a place-name is the port from which the immigrant left the old country. Few immigrants were actually born in port cities. Common European port cities include Amsterdam, Antwerp, Bremen, Copenhagen, Gothenberg, Hamburg, Le Havre, Lisbon, Liverpool, London, Naples, Oslo, Rotterdam, Stockholm, and Trieste.

Several towns with the same name. Many towns in a country have the same or similar names. For example, there are 57 places named Mount Pleasant in Great Britain and 14 towns and dozens of hamlets named Schönau in Germany. In the Netherlands, there are two towns named Nibbixwoud. To distinguish between towns with the same or similar names, find out about the area the immigrant came from. Look for the name of the state or county or a nearby city. If you still do not know which town the immigrant came from, you may need to search the records of each town with the same name.

Place-name changes. Some places have been known by more than one name. Such changes often occurred when another country took over and translated the name into its language. Gdansk in Poland was known as Danzig under German rule. Some name changes were political. For example, Kitchner, Ontario was Berlin before World War I. Other changes have evolved over time. Shropshire, England is sometimes still called Salop, its old name. Other examples include—

Old Name

Breslau

St. Petersburg

Pressburg

Chemnitz New Name

Wroclaw

Leningrad

Bratislava

Karl-Marx-Stadt

Spelling. Foreign names are often spelled differently from common spellings. There are many reasons for the variations:

Phonetic spelling. Some letters have a different sound in other languages. For example, the German *j* is pronounced like the English *y*; *j* in French is pronounced like *zhi* in English.

Misreading. Handwritten or gothic printed letters are easily misinterpreted. Be aware of this as you search handwritten records or indexes to handwritten records. For example, the German handwritten letter *w* can be confused with *m*, and the letter *k* often looks like *r*.

Special characters. Many languages use special marks called *diacritics* that change the sound, and sometimes alphabetical order, of letters. These characters are sometimes eliminated or changed into another letter when written in another language. For example, the German *ä* often, but not always, becomes *ae* in English. The Czech *š* may become *sh* or *sch*. The Dutch *ij* is usually translated as *y*.

Use comprehensive gazetteers to identify all possible towns that fit a spelling you have found. You should also be familiar with the spelling rules, phonetics, and handwriting of the immigrant's native language. The Family History Library and family history centers have word lists that explain such information for some major languages. You may also want to ask for help from another researcher who knows the culture, language, and history.

Proving You Found the Immigrant. When you find a place that appears to be the immigrant's hometown, search the civil or church records of that place. If you find records there of a person with the immigrant's name, you must verify whether the person is really the immigrant.

Use the minimum identification. Use the information from step 1 to identify your ancestor. The person's birth date and parents (or other relatives) should correspond with the information you know about the immigrant. Although the spelling of names may have changed from one country to the other, the names should be essentially the same. Names may have been translated or shortened, or the immigrant may have used a middle name after emigration.

Test the new information. Make sure the information you found in country-of-origin records matches the information in country-of-arrival records. Some names are so common you may find several families whose children have the same names. The more you know about the immigrant's family, the more likely you can verify that you found the right person.

Try to disprove the connection. One useful tactic is to try and prove that the person you found is *not* the immigrant. You know the person you found is not the immigrant if he or she died before the immigrant left the country of origin or if he or she appears in records while living in the country of arrival.

If you cannot disprove the connection, it does not mean you have found the immigrant. Weigh the evidence of these three factors to decide if you found the right person and if you are ready to seek earlier generations.

PART 2. COUNTRY-OF-ARRIVAL RECORDS

The best sources for determining an immigrant ancestor's place of origin are usually those made in the country of arrival, not the country of origin. Most immigrants spent much of their adult lives in their new countries, so more records exist for them there. It is usually easier to search country-of-arrival records because it is easier to find out which jurisdictions kept records about the immigrant. You will have more success if you use all available country-of-arrival records.

Search Tactics Immigrants were usually mentioned in several different records in their new country. However, it is hard to predict which, if any, of those records will name the immigrant's home town. The following search tactics can help you systematically search country-of-arrival records. Search these records thoroughly because it is hard to know which record has useful information. Keep careful notes of everything you learn; they may lead to more information. Whenever you learn new information, reconsider which tactic to apply next.

The general strategy is to search family sources first, then records of previous research, and finally original records about the immigrant. Even if you cannot find the place of origin with country-of-arrival records, any information you find will be valuable when using the records of the old country.

1. Search Family Sources Begin your research with family and home sources. Collect all the information you can about the immigrant and his or her parents, spouse, or children. Even information not about the place of origin may be a clue.

Look for names, dates, places, relatives, and clues in certificates, family Bibles, obituaries, diaries, tombstone inscriptions, military papers, passports, letters and post marks, photographs, and similar sources. Contact relatives, family friends, and neighbors and ask for family information or referrals to someone who might have information. Many researchers find their ancestor's hometown in family and home sources.

2. Survey General Records of Previous Research After reviewing home and family sources, look for research done by others on your family lines. Someone else may have already identified the immigrant's place of origin. Even if you do not find the place of origin, you might uncover important clues. Seek information for both the immigrant ancestor and other family members.

Look for large indexed or alphabetical collections first. At the Family History Library, look in the Surname section of the catalog for family histories and biographies, Ancestral File, International Genealogical Index, and Family Group Records Collections. Each of these contains millions of names, is international in scope, and represents many hours of work done by others. Also search previous research collected by other libraries and archives.

Seek published genealogies, family histories, and biographies. Many focus on immigrant ancestors as a starting point and show several generations of descendants. Look for catalogs and indexes from other libraries to help find published genealogies.

If one particular compiled record does not help, search for others until you have exhausted all available sources of previous research.

For more information, see the “Biography,” “Genealogy,” and “Periodicals” sections below.

3. Check Local Records for Previous Research Libraries, archives, and societies near where an immigrant settled may collect previous research about the local people. For example, local genealogies, biographies, town or county histories, and genealogical and historical periodicals may reveal the place of origin. Look for compiled works done on town, county, state, or provincial levels. Also look for local genealogical or historical societies who publish periodicals or have research registration programs. See the sections “Archives and Libraries,” “History,” and “Societies” below.

4. Search Local Original Records Certain types of original records are more likely to give immigration information than others. (See the “Records Selection Table.”) Search these first, then search other original records until you discover the hometown and as much information as possible about the immigrant and his or her family.

No single source always gives the place of origin. It is crucial to thoroughly search all available original records for three reasons. First, searching all records increases your chances of finding the place of origin. Second, you may learn more minimum identification facts. Third, you can develop a fuller biography and more accurate family group records about the immigrant.

First search for original records related to the immigrant's death. See the sections below on “Church Records,” “Vital Records,” “Obituaries,” “Cemetery Records,” and “Probate Records.”

Next search records of other events, such as confirmation, marriage, and children's births. Both church and civil authorities kept marriage and birth records. See the “Records Selection Table” for more original records to search.

Many types of local original records can help establish where an immigrant settled, indicate if property was purchased, reveal an occupation, and so on. In addition to the sections noted above, see “Census,” “Court Records,” “Land and Property,” “Occupations,” or “Pensions.”

5. Determine Immigration Information If using the previous tactics does not reveal the immigrant's hometown, search for immigration and naturalization records. Passenger lists, immigrant aid society records, and applications for citizenship fall into this group. Some churches kept lists of immigrant families, giving information about their arrival, place of origin, and place of settlement.

Focus on learning immigration information such as the date and port of departure or arrival, ship or shipping line, and traveling companions. This information is usually on a passenger list.

For recent immigrants (usually after 1880), naturalization and immigration documents often include a specific town of origin. For earlier immigrants, the most useful information is the immigration date.

With it you can usually find other information in passenger lists and other records. You can learn the date of immigration from some census records and most naturalization records. To approximate an arrival date, you can learn the immigrant's first—

Child to be born in the new country.

Residence in the new country.

Land purchase.

Appearance in church records.

If you know the name of the ship an immigrant came on, you can use lists of ship arrivals to find possible dates of arrival. However, some ships landed several times a year in the same country, making the arrival date harder to estimate.

See the “Emigration and Immigration” and “Naturalization and Citizenship” sections below.

6. Search Other Jurisdictions If local records do not yield a place of origin, move to broader jurisdictions. Try original state and national records. Not every immigrant is in these records, but many are.

For more information on national original records that may give a place of origin, see the “Census,” “Pension,” and “Military Records” sections below.

7. Determine the Country, State, or Region of Origin If you have not learned the town name, at least determine the country of origin. If you know the country, try to learn the specific region or state. Knowing the country is sometimes enough to use country-of-origin records. However, the more you know about the place of origin, the easier it is to search country-of-origin records.

Occasionally you can find the name of a hometown but not know which country it is in. For example, both Scotland and Ireland have a town named Maryville. Determining the country or region can solve such problems.

Find out what language the immigrant spoke. Family surnames are often clues to national origin. For example, a surname ending with “ski” or “sky” indicates Polish or Russian origin.

You can usually determine the country or region an immigrant is from by talking to descendants, using census records, or searching compiled records. For example, the International Genealogical Index could reveal where a particular name occurs most frequently.

8. Trace Relatives and Neighbors If you still cannot find the place of origin, there are two other approaches you can use.

First repeat the previous tactics for other members of the immigrant's family. If you can find the place of origin for a brother or uncle, local records will usually confirm that your ancestor also lived there.

Second, use these tactics to seek the immigrant's neighbors. Immigrants often traveled as groups and settled together in the new country. Others joined friends or relatives already there. Finding a neighbor's place of origin may reveal your ancestor's as well.

Country of Arrival

Records Selection Table

1. .Search Tactic... 2. Look First In... 3.Then Search... 1. Family Sources See “1. Search Family Sources” in Part 2

2.General records of previous research Genealogy, Periodicals Biography, Societies

3.Local records of previous research History, Genealogy, Biography, Periodicals, Societies Probate Records, Archives and Libraries

4.Local original records Obituaries, Church Records, Vital Records, Naturalization and Citizenship, Cemeteries Newspapers, Business Records and Commerce, Probate Records, Voting Registers, Court Records, Land and Property

5.Immigration information Emigration and Immigration, Naturalization and Citizenship, Societies Obituaries, Census, History, Newspapers, Voting Registers, Military Records, Church Records

6.Records of other jurisdictions Census, Naturalization and Citizenship, Military Records Land and Property, Pensions

7.Determine country, state, or region of origin Emigration and Immigration, History, Biography, Naturalization and Citizenship, Societies, Vital Records Census, Obituaries, Periodicals, Newspapers, Military Records, Business Records and Commerce, Pensions

8.Trace relatives and neighbors Census, Emigration and Immigration, History, Genealogy, Societies Vital Records, Newspapers, Obituaries, Biography

Archives and Libraries In addition to the Family History Library, other record repositories have collections you can use to find an immigrant's place of origin. Most archives and libraries focus their historical and genealogical collections on the cities, towns, counties, regions, or subjects they serve. Some have a national focus. Many have immigrant and ethnic sources.

Archive and library collections often have family and local histories, biographies, church records, cemetery record collections, immigration records, courthouse records, census, organization records, directories, newspapers, and other records relating to people in their jurisdiction. Many have special indexes and manuscript collections found only in their facilities. For example, the Immigration History Research Center at the University of Minnesota has a large collection of ethnic newspapers on microfilm that is available through interlibrary loan. It also has fraternal society membership and insurance records in its non-circulating manuscript collections.

A growing number of organizations are devoted exclusively to collecting and preserving materials for specific immigrant or ethnic groups. An example is the—

[Swenson Swedish Immigration Center](#)

Augustana College

639 38th Street

Rock Island, Illinois 61201-2296 The genealogical and historical collections and services of many public universities and special libraries are described in—

Bentley, Elizabeth Petty. **[The Genealogists's Address Book](#)**. Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co., Inc., 1991. (FHL book 973 D24ben.)

Filby, P. William, comp. **[Directory of American Libraries with Genealogy or Local History Collections](#)**. Wilmington, Del.: Scholarly Resources, 1988. (FHL book 973 A3fi.)

Inventories, Registers, Catalogs. Many archives and libraries have catalogs, inventories, guides, or periodicals that describe their holdings. If possible, study these guides before visiting a repository. Copies at the Family History Library are listed in the Locality section of the Family History Library Catalog under [STATE or PROVINCE], [COUNTY], [CITY] - ARCHIVES AND LIBRARY - INVENTORIES, REGISTERS, CATALOGS. One such guide for the **[University of Minnesota](#)** is—
Moody, Suzanna, and Joel Wurl, eds. **[The Immigration History Research Center: A Guide to Collections](#)**. New York: Greenwood Press, 1991. (FHL book 977.658 A3i.)

Biography The Family History Library and other major research libraries have thousands of biographical books, articles, films, and microfiche. Such works often provide exact information on an immigrant's origin. If not, they may have clues that could help you find it. Biographies may suggest an ethnic background or give the original spelling of the surname or locality.

Biographical sketches are often found in local collective biographical works and local histories. These were very common in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Many other biographical records have been published.

Two sources that can help you find out if a biographical sketch may have been written about your ancestor are—

Slocum, Robert D. **[Biographical Dictionaries and Related Works](#)**. 2 vols., 2nd ed. Detroit: Gale Research Co., 1986. (FHL book 016.92 SLo53 1986.) This bibliography lists over 16,000 collective biographies from around the world.

Herbert, Miranda C., and Barbara McNeil, eds., **[Biography and Genealogy Master Index](#)**. 8 vols., 5 vols., 3 vols, and annual supps. since 1990. Detroit: Gale Research Co., 1980, 1985-. (FHL book Ref 016.92 G131.) This work indexes more than eight million biographies of nearly three million individuals. It indexes about 2,000 volumes of nationwide sources, but it does not include local biographical sources. Most large libraries will have it.

Business Records and Commerce Business records include many different sources. Their content ranges from giving just a person's name to giving a complete profile, including a summary of professional background, age, birth date and place, the names of parents, and the names of his or her

spouse and children. Occupational records include apprenticeship or labor union records and professional associations such as “the Bar” for lawyers and the American Medical Association for doctors. However, relatively few immigrants pursued professional occupations. Records of employment with larger companies may include biographical information about recent immigrants. Many immigrants were indentured servants, apprentices whose masters paid for their passage in return for labor. Indenture records often mention birthplace or residence. Examples of these kinds of records are—

Coldham, Peter Wilson. *Child Apprentices in America From Christ's Hospital, London, 1617-1688.* Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co., 1990. (FHL book 942.1/L1 J2cp.)

———. *The Bristol Registers of Servants Sent to Foreign Plantations, 1654-1686.* Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co., 1988. (FHL book 942.41/B2 W2c.) You can find similar records in the Locality section of the Family History Library Catalog under [COUNTRY or STATE] - BUSINESS RECORDS AND COMMERCE or under [COUNTRY or STATE] - OCCUPATIONS.

Clues to an immigrant's occupation are in family sources, census records, city directories, and even ship's passenger lists. Local histories, maps, census records, and city directories can help identify nearby businesses or companies that may have needed the immigrant's skills.

Cemeteries Tombstone inscriptions and sextons' records sometimes list a foreign birthplace—often a country, less often a county or city. This is more likely in cemeteries maintained by certain churches. For example, counties of origin are often listed on tombstones of Irish immigrants buried in Roman Catholic cemeteries. In Presbyterian cemeteries, the shire and even the town where a Scottish immigrant was born may be on the tombstone.

When the birthplace is not listed, a tombstone inscription or a sexton's record may furnish that information for a relative buried nearby. However, even if a birth date and place is furnished, the relative who supplied the information may not have been correct, especially if the birthplace was in a country unfamiliar to that person.

If you cannot visit the cemetery, search any transcriptions that may have been made. The Family History Library and state and provincial archives have collections of published and manuscript tombstone inscriptions and some sextons' records. Others are at county and local genealogical and historical societies.

Census Most countries periodically take censuses that list much of their populations. Censuses identify where a person was living at a specific time. Look for indexed censuses first. If you know where the immigrant lived during the year a census was taken, you can use unindexed census records. More recent censuses usually have the most information. For example the 1900, 1910, and 1920 United States censuses provide the individual's country of birth, year of arrival, if naturalized, and occupation. The 1920 United States census should list the province (state or region) or city of birth for people (or their parents) born in Austria-Hungary, Germany, Russia, or Turkey. Some state censuses, such as the 1925 New York census (which gives the date and place of naturalization) contain more information than federal censuses. Remember that birthplaces given in census records usually refer to the state or country, not a specific town.

Spain and France took some early colonial censuses of areas in North and South America, some of which are more detailed than others. If the census is not in the archives of the former colony, it may be in the archives of the mother country and be more difficult to access. England has no census records for her North American colonies, although some colonies (states) took censuses that still exist.

Church Records While church record-keeping practices varied greatly, many denominations (particularly Lutheran, Reformed, and Roman Catholic) kept excellent records. Marriage and death records are the most likely to mention the town where an immigrant was born. Monthly Meeting

Records of the Quakers (Society of Friends) in the country of arrival sometimes name the Monthly Meeting in England a new member came from. Early Dutch and German Reformed Church records often refer to overseas origins.

Roman Catholic marriage records, especially French Canadian records, often give brides' and grooms' places of origin. The brides' and grooms' parents are often listed in records of Acadia and Quebec along with the parish they were from. The parents were sometimes residents of a parish in France.

Members of smaller religious bodies, such as the Mennonites and Doukhobors, moved in large groups from specific locations in Europe to new countries. When original church records are not available, encyclopedias and history books about such groups often contain valuable clues on the overseas origins of these people.

The Family History Library has religious records from many parts of the world. They are usually listed in the Locality section of the Family History Library Catalog under the name of the city where the congregation or parish was located. A few are listed under the name of the state or province. Some church records must be examined at the parish or the church archives where the records are stored. See the state, provincial, and national research outlines for addresses of major church archives and for more information about church records.

Court Records Court records may name family members and may mention property descriptions from the country of origin. They are more helpful for colonial times than later periods because colonial court record transcripts are usually published with comprehensive indexes. Examples of sources taken from court records are—

True, Ransom B. *Biographical Dictionary of Early Virginia 1607-1660*. Richmond: Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities, 1982. (FHL fiche 6331352.) This work lists every name in pre-1660 Virginia court records.

Tardif, Phillip. *Notorious Strumpets and Dangerous Girls: Convict Women in Van Diemen's Land, 1803-1829* (Tasmania). North Ryde, Australia: Angus & Robertson, 1990. (FHL 994.6 D3t.) Court records are valuable in establishing origins—especially when the emigrant ancestor was involved as a plaintiff, defendant, or witness. More than 50,000 English immigrants to colonial America and 150,000 to Australia were exiled convicts. Courts watched such immigrants closely.

Immigrants who had business or professional employment are more commonly listed in court records than are laborers and farmers. Once you know an immigrant ancestor was involved in a court case, review all documents related to the court action. The case file, or *packet*, is particularly vital because it contains the testimony transcripts, depositions, affidavits, and other documentary evidence.

Depositions and affidavits are the documents most likely to cite places of origin.

Emigration and Immigration Passenger arrival lists are some of the best sources for documenting an ancestor's immigration. Most immigrants should be sought in arrival lists. However, lists were not kept for every immigrant, some lists have been lost, and others are not indexed.

Immigration lists vary in content and availability depending on the time period and the port of arrival. *Earlier records seldom give the immigrant's town of origin.* They often give only the immigrant's name, age, and country of origin or the ship's last port-of-call. More recent lists tend to give more detailed information, often including the place of origin.

Some governments kept comprehensive arrival lists called *manuscript ship manifests*. However, these records vary from country to country. The United States did not require passenger arrival lists until 1820. Canada did not keep them until 1865. Australian lists date from 1826. However, some port authorities kept lists for earlier years because of local laws.

To find an immigrant on a passenger list, you need to know the immigrant's name, port of arrival, and the date of arrival. If you do not know the specific date, you may be able to find it by using a ship

arrival list if you know the year of arrival and the ship's name.

Passenger arrival lists for most ports are indexed, so approximate dates are sufficient for these lists. Unfortunately, some ports, such as [New York City](#) (from 1846 to 1897) do not have complete indexes. Such records are so vast that a more precise date (within about a week) is needed. Various fragmentary indexes are available to partially overcome this problem.

Most early lists (prior to 1820) have been published, especially for North America. A growing number of later lists are being published. Significant published arrival lists for the United States include—

Irish arrivals at New York from 1846 to 1852.

Dutch arrivals from 1820 to 1880.

German arrivals from 1727-1808; 1850-1870 (ongoing series).

These sources are generally found in the Family History Library Catalog under—
[STATE], [COUNTY], [CITY] - EMIGRATION AND IMMIGRATION UNITED STATES -
EMIGRATION AND IMMIGRATION An excellent bibliography of over 2,600 published lists of immigrants is—

Filby, P. William. [Passenger and Immigration Lists Bibliography 1538-1900](#). Rev. ed. Detroit: Gale Research, 1988. (FHL book 973 W33p 1988.) About half of the above lists are indexed in—

Filby, P. William. [Passenger and Immigration Lists Index](#). Detroit: Gale Research, 1981-. (FHL book 973 W32p and supps.) The Family History Library has copies of most available arrival lists for most destination countries. Lists are also available from the national archives of the various countries. Specific lists are described in the research outline for applicable countries.

Additional types of immigration records are available for some countries, including Canadian border crossings into the United States. There are also card indexes of Austrian settlers in Galicia ([Ansiedlerkartei nach Galizien 1782-1805](#)) and in the Banat ([Ansiedlerakten 1686-1855](#)). Passports may have been issued to immigrants by the country of arrival if they were returning to visit relatives in the country of origin. The records will usually indicate a birthplace or destination, which is likely near the place of origin. Passports were often not required until the twentieth century, but were available as early as 1795 for travelers from the United States.

Genealogy A genealogy links a family through several generations. Genealogies are valuable because they may mention an immigrant's place of origin and may contain clues about the date of immigration. When trying to find places of origin, genealogies should be one of the first records you search. Some genealogies have information found nowhere else. They can save time and avoid duplication of work. There are several types of genealogies:

Global Indexes and Collections. Databases, such as Ancestral File and the International Genealogical Index, are important places to search first.

Family Histories. Family histories often go back to the original immigrant and contain information such as ethnic and geographical beginnings. They generally include all that was known of the family at the time it was written. Family histories must be used with care due to possible inaccuracies.

Thousands of family histories are listed in the Surname section of the Family History Library Catalog. The catalog does not index every surname in a history but lists the four or five most prominent.

Genealogical Bibliographies and Indexes. The catalogs of genealogical institutions may be useful in finding published genealogies. Among them is—

Kaminkow, Marion J., ed. [Genealogies in the Library of Congress: A Bibliography](#). 2 vols. Baltimore: Magna Carta Book Co., 1972, 1977, 1987. (FHL book 016.9291 K128g.) Most archives, historical societies, and genealogical societies have similar special collections and indexes of genealogies.

Many other kinds of indexes exist. For example, a helpful index that discusses 3,500 immigrants to America before 1657 is—

Colket, Meredith B. [Founders of Early American Families](#). Rev. ed. Cleveland: Founders and Patriots

of America, 1985. (FHL book 973 W2cm.) To find bibliographies and indexes, look in the Family History Library Catalog under—

[COUNTRY] - GENEALOGY [COUNTRY] - GENEALOGY - BIBLIOGRAPHY

Genealogical Compendia. Collected lineages are often published in genealogical dictionaries and periodicals. Complete indexes increase the research value of these collections. Many focus on immigrant families. Two such collections are—

Gillen, Mollie. *The Founders of Australia: A Biographical Dictionary of the First Fleet*. Sydney: Library of Australian History, 1989. (FHL book 994 D3g.)

De Villiers, C.C. *Genealogies of Old South African Families = Geslagregisters van die ou Kaapse families*. 3 vols. Cape Town: A.A. Balkema, 1966. (FHL book 968 D2v.) There are dozens of compendia about immigrant families, including—

French families to Québec (to the early 1800s).

Maine and New Hampshire families (pre-1700).

Eighteenth century Germans in New York.

Schwenkfelders to Pennsylvania (1731-1737).

History

Published histories of the town, county, or region where an ancestor lived are often the key to identifying his or her national and ethnic origin. Histories of churches, schools, and industries may mention immigrants. In addition, they often identify records that may include the immigrant ancestor. If an ancestor was among the area's founding families or was a prominent citizen, a local history may have an account of his or her life.

Local histories include less prominent immigrants as well. Immigrants often considered it a mark of success to have a biographical sketch in the typical local histories of the nineteenth century, even if they had to pay to be included. Immigrants could be on lists of early settlers into a valley, members of a founding church, original town settlers, landholders, or school teachers. Bibliographies of local histories are available for most countries, states, and provinces. The Family History Library has an excellent collection of local histories.

Histories are available for many ethnic and religious groups. Many immigrants were part of an ethnic community in their new country. Many were also members of a religious group. Histories of smaller ethnic and religious groups often identify all or most of the members of that group. Excellent examples include—

Ulvestad, Martin. *Nordmændene i Amerika* [Norwegians in America]. 2 vols. Minneapolis: History Book Company's Forlag, 1907-10. (FHL book 973 F2u.)

Rosicky, Rose. *A History of Czechs (Bohemians) in Nebraska*. Omaha, Neb.: Czech Historical Society of Nebraska, 1929. Histories also exist for most religious groups. A good example is—

Holsinger, Henry R. *History of the Tunkers and the Brethren Church....* North Manchester, Ind.: L.W. Shultz, 1962. (FHL book 286.5 H741h.) Even histories of larger ethnic and religious groups, such as Germans or Episcopalians, can provide valuable background information about migration and settlement patterns.

Land and Property Many immigrants left their homelands for the chance to obtain inexpensive land in a new country. Land records, therefore, contain many immigration clues, even if the place of origin is generally not given. Information about an immigrant's old hometown will more likely be found in records of land purchased directly from the government (such as homesteads) rather than from private individuals.

Most deeds indicate the purchasers' and the sellers' residences. If the immigrant purchased land right after arriving in the new country, the deed could reveal the place of origin. For example, “headrights”

(the head of house's right to land for settling a colony) can show places—usually the country—of origin. Headrights are indexed in books like—

Nugent, Nell Marion. *Cavaliers and Pioneers: Abstracts of Virginia Land Patents and Grants, 1623-1732.*

Reprint. Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co., 1983. (FHL book 975.5 R2n.) Many places required that an immigrant be a citizen or that an immigrant file a declaration of intent to become a citizen before buying land. Land records may include copies of naturalization records or lead to them. An excellent set of land records with immigration data, on 1,641 rolls of microfilm, is—

Saskatchewan Homestead Records, 1870-1930, and Index. Ottawa, Canada: Canadian Department of the Interior, Dominion Lands Office.

Military Records Many immigrants served in the military of their new countries. Thousands served in the United States' army during the nineteenth century. As a result, some military records provide clues to immigrant origins. The following are especially helpful:

Pension Application Papers. These may include name; rank; military unit; period of service; residence; age; place and date of birth, marriage, and death; and the nature of disability or proof of need.

Service records. Service records document a soldier's involvement in the military. Descriptive rolls or enlistment papers may also list the birthplace.

Census records may indicate that the immigrant served in the military. For example, the 1910 United States census identifies soldiers who served in the American Civil War. Sometimes a separate schedule (that may not show birthplace) was taken of veterans, such as the 1890 United States census.

Other records that could list birthplaces include unit histories with unit rosters, veteran organization records (such as the Grand Army of the Republic), cemetery records, and old soldiers' home records. Immigrants honorably discharged were usually eligible for citizenship based on their military service. The naturalization process was often simplified for them, and separate records of soldier naturalizations may have been kept.

Naturalization and Citizenship The naturalization process varies by country, state, and time period. The records also vary. Earlier records usually give the immigrant's name, age, and country of origin. More recent records tend to be more informative. Some give a wealth of data about the immigrant and his or her family, including specific places of origin.

Not all immigrants were naturalized. In many countries, adult males were the only immigrants to be naturalized because women and children had citizenship if their husbands or fathers were citizens. Naturalization was generally not required if the immigrant settled in a colony of the mother country. Thus there are no naturalization records for British settlers of the United States before the Revolutionary War or in Canada before 1947. (Before 1947, British subjects entering Canada were considered Canadian citizens without naturalization.) During colonial times, each colony established its own laws regarding naturalization.

Although the specifics vary by place, the naturalization process was similar for most immigrants. After a specified period of residency, the alien filed a declaration of intent to be naturalized. Later he or she petitioned a court for naturalization. Seek the records for each of these steps. Declarations of intent to become a citizen and petitions for naturalization usually provide the most information.

An excellent study of United States emigration laws and records is—

Newman, John J. *American Naturalization Processes and Procedures 1790-1985.* Indianapolis, Ind.: Indianapolis Historical Society, 1985. (FHL book 973 P4n.)

Newspapers Newspapers also provide immigration information. Search both the local newspapers where the immigrant settled and the ethnic newspapers in the immigrant's language or for his or her cultural group. In addition to obituaries (described next), newspapers from the immigrant's lifetime may list—

Passengers or new arrivals.
Immigrants treated in a local hospital.
Immigrants who came as indentured servants or apprentices.
Missing relative or friend queries.
Marriage announcements.
Notices of estate probates.

An example of an index of immigrants in early newspapers is—

Harris, Ruth Ann M., and Donald M. Jacobs, eds. *The Search for Missing Friends: Irish Immigrant Advertisements Placed in the Boston Pilot 1831- 1850*. Boston: New England Historic Genealogical Society, 1989. (FHL book 974.461 H29s.) Current newspapers from the area where the immigrant settled may have genealogical columns or print queries. You can generally get newspapers through your local public library. Public libraries have bibliographies you can use to identify useful newspapers. They can usually order copies through interlibrary loan.

Additionally, ethnic immigrant newspapers often carried regular notices from correspondents in various locales. Also, many serials and newspapers of political, cultural, fraternal, religious, and other groups printed abundant news of their individual members. Good examples of ethnic newspaper bibliographies are—

Wynar, Lubomyr R., and Anna T. Wynar. *Encyclopedic Directory of Ethnic Newspapers and Periodicals in the United States*. 2nd ed. Littleton, Colo.: Libraries Unlimited, 1976. (FHL book 973 E4w.)

Arndt, Karl J.R. *German-American Newspapers and Periodicals, 1732-1955*. New York: Johnson Reprint, 1985. (FHL film 824091.)

Obituaries Obituaries are an excellent source of biographical information about immigrants. In addition to names and death dates, you can learn about surviving family members, church affiliations, spouses, parents, occupations, burial places, and hometowns in the old country. Even if a place of origin is not given, an obituary may provide additional research clues, such as the date or ship of immigration or traveling companions. Much of this information cannot be found in other sources. For many immigrants, an obituary is the only “biographical sketch” ever written about them.

Obituaries were usually published in local and church newspapers. Some also appear in church, professional, company, and school periodicals. Contact institutions an immigrant may have joined and ask if they had obituary notices. Although brief death notices appear in the earliest newspapers, traditional obituaries are most common after the mid-1800s. You are most likely to find obituaries of immigrants who lived in rural areas rather than in large cities.

Search smaller, local newspapers that feature community news. Many such newspapers are available on microfilm. The Family History Library has few newspapers, but your local library can usually get copies through interlibrary loan. Local historical societies and libraries where the newspaper is published may have obituary files or indexes as well as copies of the newspapers. Many North American newspapers are listed in—

Newspapers in Microform: United States. 2 vols. Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, 1984. (FHL book 011.35 N479 1984.) It is helpful to know the exact death date before searching for an obituary. If you have the death date, search papers beginning the day after the death and search for a full week or more. For weekly papers, search at least two issues after the death. If you do not know the death date, a local library may have an index to the obituaries in that newspaper. If the paper or its successor is still being published, the publisher may have back copies or an index to obituaries. In addition to obituaries, you may find other references to the immigrant's death in a newspaper, including death and funeral notices, condolences of friends, and thank you notices from the family.

Pensions A pension is money paid to an individual (or surviving relatives) on a regular basis because of his or her past service or employment. It is most often given after retirement and meeting specific conditions (usually age and years of service). This group of records is distinctive because of these conditions. Because age was a factor, the applicant had to provide proof of birth. When the benefit went to a pensioner's heir, the heir had to prove his or her relationship. Thus, many pension files contain pages torn from family Bibles, original marriage certificates, or affidavits from family and friends documenting the vital events of the pensioner's life and that of his or her family. These files are sometimes the only place you can find this information.

Although many countries have granted land or pensions for military service since the late eighteenth century, most pension records are a relatively modern record type. (See the "Military Records" section of this outline.) Pension records of private and public companies can be very informative, but they are generally available only since the early 1900s. You must usually contact the company or successor company to get copies of pension records.

Social Security and Government Pensions. Most modern federal governments provide some kind of pension to many of their citizens. In the United States, the Social Security Act, passed in 1935, provides this. Many early applicants were born between 1850 and 1880. In general, the application form provides the date of the application, the name and address of the applicant and the employer, the applicant's birth date and place, and the parents' full names (including the mother's maiden name). The records for living individuals are restricted. However, records of people who have already died generally are not. You must know the individual's name and any government-assigned number to request a copy of the application form. You need to provide evidence that the individual is deceased and pay any government fees. In the United States, send your request to the—

Social Security Administration

ATTN: Freedom of Information Officer

4-H-8 Annex Building

6401 Security Boulevard

Baltimore, MD 21235 The individual's pension number may appear on his or her death record. For

United States citizens, you can search the Social Security Death Index. This file is part of the

FamilySearch™ computer system at the Family History Library and many family history centers. This file includes Social Security card holders who died between 1962 and 1988.

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Periodicals Genealogical, lineage society, religious, and historical periodicals are most helpful when you know where an immigrant settled and his or her ethnic group. Genealogical and historical societies usually publish periodicals about the people in the geographic area or ethnic group they cover. Family organizations often publish newsletters with immigrant information.

Periodicals often reprint various types of material, including abstracts from original sources.

Periodical articles include—

Passenger list abstracts.

Naturalization list abstracts.

Sketches about early pioneers.

Ethnic group background information.

Church record abstracts.

Genealogical sketches.

Pedigrees (sometimes called *ahnentafels*)

Query lists

Genealogical society periodicals are a good place to publish queries for information about immigrant ancestors. There may be a fee for this service, especially for nonmembers. Also check indexes to previous queries and answers.

An excellent list of most English language periodicals is—

Bibliography of Genealogy and Local History Periodicals With Union List of Major U.S. Collections. Fort Wayne, Ind.: Allen County Public Library Foundation, 1990. (FHL book 973 D23b.) Many periodicals index their own articles. A major index of over 2,000 English language and French Canadian family history periodicals is the—

[Periodical Source Index \(PERSI\)](#). Fort Wayne, Ind.: Allen County Public Library, 1986-. (FHL fiche 6016863-64.) To find periodicals and available indexes, see the “Periodicals” section of the research outline for the state, province, or country where the individual settled. Also check the Locality section of the Family History Library Catalog under the topic PERIODICALS. To find periodicals for family and surname organizations, check the Surname section of the catalog. In addition, look for ethnic groups in the Subject section under headings like—

JEWS - PERIODICALS IRISH - AUSTRALIA - PERIODICALS HUGUENOTS - FRANCE - GENEALOGY - PERIODICALS

Probate Records Probate records are most helpful for finding places of origin during colonial periods than in later times. Probates from colonial eras are often published and indexed. An example is—

Dobson, David. **[Scottish-American Heirs, 1683-1883](#)**. Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co., 1990.

(FHL book 941 D2d.) Also, colonial immigrants often identified themselves by their hometown, especially in places like Dutch New Amsterdam (now New York). Family members left behind in the old country are mentioned more often in colonial wills. Some well-to-do immigrants held property in their parent countries that could be described in probate documents. Even if they do not directly mention the place of origin, probates may have clues that lead to the place of origin.

See the state and country research outlines and the Locality section of the Family History Library Catalog under the topic PROBATE RECORDS for available manuscript and published sources.

Societies Societies often collect helpful records such as family and local histories, oral histories, church records, newspapers, cemetery record collections, passenger lists, manuscripts, organization membership applications, early settler indexes, military records, directories, and so on. Genealogical and historical societies are organized almost everywhere. Historical societies for most ethnic and religious groups also exist—for example, the **[American Historical Society of Germans from Russia](#)**.

Also search for pioneer or old settler societies. Contact these societies to learn about their services and hours. They are usually very cooperative and can help you find good local researchers. Your public

library normally has guides to help locate these organizations. Two North American guides are—
Directory of Historical Organizations in the United States and Canada. 14th ed. Nashville: American Association for State and Local History, 1990. (FHL book 970 H24d.)

Bentley, Elizabeth Petty. ***The Genealogist's Address Book***. Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co., 1991. (FHL book 973 D24ben.) The records of societies an immigrant joined during his or her life are harder to locate. Foreigners often received financial and other assistance from immigrant aid societies. An immigrant may have sent money back to his family or brought relatives from the old country through an immigrant aid society. These societies were usually associated with ethnic, religious, or community organizations. The Perpetual Emigration Fund is an example of a Latter-day Saint immigrant aid society. The Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society assisted Jewish people. Chinese clans organized immigrant aid societies to help immigrants to America, Australia, and Southeast Asia. Their records are some of the best sources for tracing Chinese emigrants. Ask local and ethnic historical societies about records and addresses of immigrant aid societies that operated in the area.

After the immigrant settled, he or she may have sought the company of people with similar interests and joined an ethnic or fraternal organization like the Veterans of Foreign Wars, a German-American Club, a Jewish Landsmanschaft, the Grange, a Masonic lodge, the Sons of Italy, or the National Slovak Society. These societies have a vast amount of personal information in membership records and insurance files. (Ethnic fraternal organizations served as the insurance companies of the nineteenth century.)

Although they may be difficult to locate, ethnic and fraternal society records sometimes provide crucial immigration information. A book that helps locate ethnic associations is—

Encyclopedia of Associations. Annual. Detroit: Gale Research, 25th ed. in 1991. (FHL book 973 E4gr.) See section 10, “Fraternal, Foreign Interest, Nationality, and Ethnic Organizations.” For a description of ethnic association records, see—

Records of Ethnic Fraternal Benefit Associations in the United States: Essays and Inventories. St. Paul: Minn.: Immigration History Research Center, University of Minnesota, 1981. (FHL book 973 F24r.)

For addresses and descriptions of many ethnic groups, see—

Wynar, Lubomyr R. ***Encyclopedic Directory of Ethnic Organizations in the United States***. Littleton, Colo.: Libraries Unlimited, 1975. (FHL book 305.8 W99e.)

Vital Records Vital records, known as civil registration outside the United States and Canada, are government records of births, marriages, and deaths.

Twentieth-century marriage and death records often include detailed information about a person's birthplace and parents' names. Earlier civil vital records, when they exist, often have limited immigration information. Marriage records and death certificates may merely give country of birth. Even when vital records are unlikely to reveal a specific birthplace, search them for other important information. Civil death and marriage records may suggest other sources to search, such as which church the immigrant attended, which mortuary handled the funeral arrangements, or which cemetery he or she is buried in.

Even if a complete birth date and place is on a death certificate, the information may not be entirely accurate since the person reporting the event may not have known the place of origin. Verify information in civil vital records against information from other sources, such as censuses, ship passenger lists, cemetery records, or church records.

The Family History Library has civil vital records from many places. They are also available from government agencies. Addresses of vital records offices are listed in state, provincial, and country research outlines.

Voting Registers While many voting registers provide only the voter's name and voting district, others include an address; how long he or she has lived in the precinct, county, state, province, or country; birthplace; and whether naturalized (and sometimes the date and court of naturalization). Even when

voting registers do not provide naturalization information, the fact that the immigrant is listed suggests he or she was naturalized. Voting records can help locate an individual in a specific time period and can point to other records of that locality. Voting records can usually be found at the local county courthouse or the state archives.

PART 3. COUNTRY-OF-ORIGIN RECORDS

You will generally be more successful in learning an immigrant's place of origin with records of the country of arrival. However, some researchers do find the immigrant's hometown in country-of-origin records, especially for uncommon surnames in countries with nationwide indexes or where adequate emigration lists exist. Generally you must know at least the country the emigrant left before you can begin searching these records. If nothing else, you should be able to find that information in country-of-arrival records. In a few cases, you may be able to begin if you know only that the emigrant came from Europe, Scandinavia, or Great Britain. However, get as much information as possible from country-of-arrival records.

Search Tactics There are many record types you can use when searching in country-of-origin records. However, they are all not equally valuable. Most record types are best used together with other record types as part of a search strategy that includes one or more tactics. The following discussion of search tactics is based on a comprehensive strategy of narrowing the possible places where an emigrant may have come from.

Search records and indexes covering a large area first. Next search records that might narrow the possible locations until you have found the right one. Information and clues in the records of the immigrant's new country determine which tactics to use when searching the records of the old country. The following tactics can help you systematically search country-of-origin records. Whenever you learn new information, reconsider which tactic to apply next.

1. Survey Records of Previous Research The first place to search in country-of-origin records is those records containing research already done by others. In many cases, other researchers have already found where the emigrant came from. A distant, unknown relative may have the information, or indexes may contain the emigrant's birth record.

This tactic is similar to the second tactic in "Part 2. Country-of-Arrival." You may use some of the same *types* of records, but focus on country-of-origin records.

A survey of previous research should include indexes to and databases of compiled records, such as the International Genealogical Index and Ancestral File. Also search published family histories, periodical articles, genealogical dictionaries, compendia, and local histories of the immigrant's original country. FamilySearch™ computers at the Family History Library and family history centers offer convenient access to many key sources such as the Family History Library Catalog, International Genealogical Index, and Ancestral File.

Sections of this outline that describe previous research include "Biography," "Genealogy," "History," and "Periodicals."

Some genealogical societies encourage members to register their names and the ancestral lines they are working on. See the “Societies” section below.

2. Search Nationwide Records Some countries of origin kept nationwide records. Where available and indexed, these records are an excellent tool that may identify an emigrant. For example, British countries have excellent national records, many of which are being indexed. You must, however, have enough identifying information to recognize the immigrant.

Records most likely to apply to this tactic are discussed in the “Census,” “Civil Registration,” and “Taxation” sections of this outline.

3. Search Departure Records Where possible, search the records created when the emigrant left the old country. These include passenger lists, permissions to emigrate, and other lists of emigrants. Where they exist, records of departure are generally easy to access and almost always identify from which town the emigrant left. However, not all such records have been preserved, are indexed, or are available to search. Furthermore, some emigration was illegal. In such cases, few, if any, records of departure exist.

To search departure records, you must know the country the emigrant left. This is generally not hard to learn. However, you should also know as much as possible about the emigrant, including the state, county, or area where he or she likely lived and the port from which he or she probably departed. You can often find this information in biographical sources in the country of arrival. Immigration sources, such as passenger arrival lists, usually identify the port of departure.

Departure records are generally under the jurisdiction of the port city (such as passenger departure lists) or the state or national government where the emigrant lived, such as permission to emigrate. If you know the emigrant's state or region of residence or port of departure, see “Court Records,” “Emigration and Immigration,” “History,” and “Population.”

4. Localize the Surname Some surnames are more common in certain areas than in others. It may be possible to determine what region or specific area the surname is found in, especially if you are dealing with an uncommon surname. Because records exist at all levels of jurisdiction, the more closely you can determine where your ancestor came from, the more records you can search.

If you cannot learn the state or region where the emigrant lived, determine the general region or area where the family came from or where the surname is most common. After that, you might find emigration indexes or other sources that cover specific regions or localities.

Many sources, such as census records and vital records in the country of arrival, may give at least a province name. Sometimes family information and traditions can give a province or county name. Family traditions may also indicate that the place was near a particular river, seacoast, or agricultural district. Any such information may help narrow your search.

If you search indexes (such as the International Genealogical Index) and do not find your ancestor, you may find that everyone with that surname came from the same province. The information found in tactics one and two often helps find the region where the surname is most common. You can use any general index that covers a broad spectrum of the population in this manner. Once you know which region the name comes from, search the records and indexes pertaining to that particular region.

Many sources can help you determine the region where the emigrant lived. See the sections below on “Civil Registration,” “Directories,” “Genealogy,” “History,” “Names, Personal,” “Periodicals,” and “Societies.”

5. Search Regional Records Once you have found a probable region, state, province, or county where the emigrant lived, many sources could identify him or her. Even if these sources do not name the town

of origin, they may help to localize the name to a few specific places.

Regional records to search include "Census," "Civil Registration," "Court Records," "Emigration and Immigration," "Genealogy," "History," "Military Records," "Newspapers," "Periodicals," "Societies," and "Taxation."

6. Search Local Records Eventually you will have to search local records. Hopefully your research has identified the specific town of origin. In such cases, search local records such as "Church Records" and "Civil Registration" to confirm the emigrant's origin and to extend the ancestry.

If you have not identified a specific town but are confident you know the region, search local records. Some records are formatted so you can easily search several localities within a region. In addition to church and civil records noted above, see "Census," "Court Records," "Land and Property," "Newspapers," "Population," "Probate Records," and "Taxation."

Country of Origin

Records Selection Table This table can help you decide which records to search. In Column 1, find the search tactic you selected. In Column 2, find the record types that are most likely to have the information you need. Then turn to that record type in this section. Additional records that may be useful are in Column 3. The terms used in both Columns 2 and 3 are the same as the record headings used in this outline and the subject headings used in the Family History Library Catalog.

Search Tactic	Record Types	Additional Records
1. Survey general previous research	Genealogy, Societies, Periodicals	1. Survey general previous research
2. Look First In...	Civil Registration; Census; Church Records; Names, Personal Taxation, Directories, Periodicals	2. Search nationwide records
3. Then Search...	Emigration and Immigration, Population History, Newspapers, Court Records, Military Records	3. Search departure records
4. Localize the surname	Names, Personal; Directories; Societies	Civil Registration, Census, Periodicals
5. Search regional records	Church Records, Civil Registration, Genealogy, History, Societies, Periodicals, Court Records	Directories, Census, Newspapers, Taxation, Military Records, Land and Property
6. Search local records	Church Records, Civil Registration, History, Census Genealogy, Periodicals, Societies, Newspapers, Probate Records, Taxation, Court Records, Population, Land and Property	

Census Although census records exist in Continental Europe, Scandinavia, Africa, Asia, and Latin America, they do not have general indexes as do United States census records. The 1881 census of England and Wales is being indexed, but only parts of it are currently available. In many countries, censuses usually cover fairly small areas if they exist at all. They can be used to identify or eliminate possible places an emigrant might have lived. The national research outlines describe the availability of censuses and indexes for various countries.

Church Records Various Christian denominations generate records of the people that belong to their congregations. Records of christenings, marriages, confirmations, and burials are some you can expect to find. Some church records are indexed. There are also published extracts of church records. The *Ortssippenbücher* (village lineage books) in Germany are generally extracts of church and other records that have been compiled into family groups and published

Most church records are kept by the parish or congregation. You will need to know the place of origin before searching them. Therefore, these records are usually more useful for proving you have found the correct place of origin rather than for finding a place of origin.

Nationwide indexes are available for a few countries, such as the Old Parochial Registers of the Church of Scotland (available at family history centers). Completely extracted and indexed by county, these records are also listed in the International Genealogical Index. The International Genealogical Index also indexes many, but not all, church records for some countries, including Scotland, England, Germany, Mexico, and the Scandinavian countries. Check the Family History Library Catalog for other indexes to church records.

Many archives have church records, and they often publish inventories of their holdings. Archives may also compile indexes to the church records of the region they serve. If you can access church records from several parishes in a regional archive, you can use church records as part of tactic 5 (searching regional records). For guides to archives, look in the Locality section of the Family History Library Catalog under [COUNTRY], [COUNTY], [CITY] - ARCHIVES AND LIBRARIES.

Civil Registration Civil registration records of births, marriages, deaths, and sometimes divorces are kept by national or local governments. Finding an emigrant in civil registration records usually means you have found his or her place of origin. In most cases, it is not a means of finding emigrants. Their value increases when they are indexed nationwide, such as in England and Wales after 1837, New Zealand after 1848, Scotland after 1855, and Ireland after 1864. In some countries, civil registration records are indexed by town or county, as in France after 1792, Belgium after 1796, and the Netherlands after 1811.

The availability of indexes determines whether to use civil registration earlier or later in your research. Find out when civil registration began in the area where your emigrant lived.

To see if civil registration records for the country have been indexed, search the Locality section of the Family History Library Catalog under [LOCALITY] - CIVIL REGISTRATION - INDEXES.

Some areas, such as Scandinavian countries, did not have civil registration but used the government-sponsored church to register the vital information of its citizens.

Court Records Look first for published court record abstracts with indexes. In some countries, such as Germany, emigrants had to show their debts were paid to get permission to leave. People who left without permission (fugitives) are also sometimes mentioned. In some countries, like England, courts deported criminals to America or Australia during colonial times. Some such records are indexed, for example—

Coldham, Peter Wilson. *The Complete Book of Emigrants in Bondage, 1614-1775*. Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co., 1988. (FHL book 973 W2c.)

———. *The Complete Book of Emigrants, 1607-1660*. Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co., 1987. (FHL book 973 W2coL.) You can also use court records when you know the region where an emigrant may have lived. This is difficult and requires searching the appropriate records for the time period when the immigrant left. You may have to hire on-site researchers to investigate foreign court records. For court record indexes and abstracts on emigrants, deported convicts, or bonded servants, check the Locality section of the Family History Library Catalog under [COUNTRY] - EMIGRATION AND IMMIGRATION.

Directories City and telephone directories are useful for localizing an uncommon surname, especially in Italy, England, Scotland, and Wales. Computerized phone directories are available for Germany on compact disc (from Phone Disc USA, 20 Edenville Rd, Warwick, NY 10990) and in France through Minitel and Geopatronyme computer services. With such tools, you may search for a name from the

entire country. While this approach locates present-day people with the same surname, you may find relatives of the emigrant or other people interested in your research. Often families with the same surname (especially an uncommon surname) know the area where the family originated. The Family History Library has many nineteenth-century city directories from major cities of several countries. These directories may identify the emigrant, if he or she lived in that city. They also indicate how common the surname was in the region where the city was located. To use older directories to localize a surname, search all available city directories from the country of origin. This is usually easiest when used with other sources, such as the International Genealogical Index or surname books, and when you have narrowed the search to a part of a country. Note how often the surname appears in comparison to the total names (or pages) in the directory. Uncommon surnames are usually most strongly represented in one or two cities. Directories are best used as clues to the region where the name is common. Most emigrants did not live in cities for which directories were printed.

Emigration and Immigration The process of emigrating from one country to another generated various records. Often a country required the emigrant to receive permission to leave. If the emigrant obeyed this law (about one-third did not), there may be an application to leave or a passport. Emigrants also had to book passage and board a vessel for the new country. Each step could have generated a record. Records of departure in the country of origin are called emigration records. Most emigration records give the emigrant's name, age, close relatives or traveling companions, and last place of residence (sometimes birthplace).

To use emigration lists, you must know the country of origin (or the port of departure) and when the emigrant left. A growing number of lists have been indexed. The archives in some countries have prepared indexes of emigrants from particular regions to better document emigration. Private authors have also compiled or indexed specific emigration records. Many emigration records and indexes are listed in the Locality section of the Family History Library Catalog under [COUNTRY] - EMIGRATION AND IMMIGRATION.

Departure Lists. Some ports made lists of departing passengers. These records include such information as age, occupation, and last place of residence or birthplace. While some records have not been preserved, many are now on microfilm. Where available, these are an excellent source for finding an emigrant's place of origin. Many existing departure lists are available at the Family History Library. Of particular interest are the port records of Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden (see Step 5 "Place-Names" section for a list of major European port cities). The [Hamburg, Germany, departure lists](#) begin in 1850. Most eastern Europeans departed from Hamburg, including people from Austria, Czechoslovakia, Denmark, Hungary, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Russia, and Sweden. See the Library's resource guide [The Hamburg Passenger Lists, 1850-1934](#) (34047). Significant published departure lists for Europe and Great Britain include—
Dutch emigrants from 1835 to 1880.
English to America 1773-1776.
Irish departures 1833 to 1839 and 1847 to 1871 (incomplete).

Passports and Permissions to Emigrate. Passports and emigration applications are available for Baden, Hesse, various French departments, and many other areas. An excellent example of the growing number of published emigration lists is—
Schenk, Trudy, and Ruth Froelke. [The Wuerttemberg Emigration Index](#). 5 vols. Salt Lake City, Utah: Ancestry, 1986. (FHL book 943.47 W22st.) Other published lists of German emigrant applications include—
Brunswick, 1846-1871.
Hessen Kassel, 1840-1850.
Hessen-Nassau, 1806-1866.

Lippe, to 1877.

Minden, Westphalia, 1816-1900.

Münster, Westphalia, 1803-1850.

Rhine Palatine and Saarland, 1700s.

Waldeck, 1829-1872.

Illegal Emigration. Many emigrants left their native country without permission from their government. While illegal emigrants did not receive permission to emigrate, governments sometimes tried to identify them after their departure. One example of an index of illegal Swiss emigrants is—Faust, Albert Bernhardt. [*Lists of Swiss Emigrants in the Eighteenth Century to the American Colonies*](#). 2 vols. Reprint. Washington, D.C.: National Genealogical Society, 1976. (FHL book 973 W2fa; fiche 6048998.) Some professional researchers have lists of illegal emigrants in their files. For information on hiring a researcher, see the Family History Library's [*Hiring a Professional Genealogist*](#).

Other Published Lists and Indexes. More than 2,600 other published sources are listed in—Filby, P. William. [*Passenger and Immigration Lists Bibliography, 1538-1900*](#). About half of the above lists are indexed in—

Filby, P. William. [*Passenger and Immigration Lists Index*](#).

Genealogy Compiled genealogies and other sources for previous research should be the first place you look in the old country. A surprising number of genealogies, family history bibliographies, and indexes are published for many countries.

Global Indexes and Collections. These records are generally worldwide, so you only need a vague idea of a place of origin to search them. They are often available at family history centers, arranged by world region or surname.

Ancestral File links millions of computerized names into families and pedigrees. Many lines extend back to the country of origin. It also helps you find other researchers interested in the same lines.

International Genealogical Index lists millions of names by country or state. It indexes church record births and marriages and is one of the most helpful tools for localizing surnames. The index is an important source and should be one of the first places you check for all countries of origin, especially Belgium, Denmark, England, Finland, Liechtenstein, Mexico, Norway, Scotland, Sweden, Switzerland, and Wales.

Family Group Records Collection ([*Archive*](#) and [*Patron*](#)) includes family sheets arranged alphabetically by the father's name. Many lines are followed back to the emigrant's place of origin.

Research coordination registers list individuals who have researched selected surnames and who will share their information with you. At the Family History Library, Ancestral File is replacing the Family Registry, but the registry is still useful. An international query registry is Keith A. Johnson and Malcolm R. Sainty's [*Genealogical Research Directory*](#) (Washington, D.C.: Johnson & Sainty, 1985-Annual; FHL book 929.1025 G286grd).

Family Histories. Your ancestor's birthplace may be published in a family history. Often books published in foreign countries follow family lines down to the name of a family member who emigrated. You may be able to identify an individual in a foreign family history as being your ancestor.

Genealogical Bibliographies and Indexes. Many countries have bibliographies of published family histories with alphabetical indexes to the major surnames. Periodical indexes may also help you locate emigrant families. The genealogies cited in these bibliographies or indexes often mention emigrants. The comprehensiveness of these bibliographies and indexes varies by country. Important examples

are—

Arnaud, Étienne. [Repertoire de généalogies françaises imprimées](#). [French genealogical bibliography]. 3 vols. Paris: Berger Levrault, 1978-1982. (FHL book 944 D23a).

Van Beresteyn, E.A. [Genealogisch Repertorium](#). [Dutch Genealogical Bibliography]. Den Haag, Netherlands: Centraal Bureau voor Genealogie, 1972. (FHL book 949.2 D25b.)

Marshall, George W., ed. [The Genealogist's Guide](#). Reprint of 1903 ed. Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co., 1980. (FHL book 929.142 M356g; film 496,451.)

Whitmore, John B. [A Genealogist's Guide: An Index to British Pedigrees in Continuation of Marshall's Genealogist's Guide \(1903\)](#). London: Walford Bro., 1953. (FHL book 929.142 M356g supp.; fiche 6054492.) See the Locality section of the Family History Library Catalog under—

[COUNTRY] - GENEALOGY - BIBLIOGRAPHY [COUNTRY] - GENEALOGY - INDEXES

Genealogical Compendia. These collected genealogies (lineages) of thousands of families often mention emigrants. The higher social classes are better represented in most compendia. They are often published as periodicals, and many have indexes. An outstanding series with over 197 volumes for Germany is the—

[Deutsches Geschlechterbuch](#) [German lineage book]. Limburg an der Lahn: C.A. Starke, 1889-. (FHL book 943 D2dg.)

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History

Histories about the country of origin and emigration from that country can reveal much about an emigrant, including the circumstances of the departure. Histories often give clues to emigration patterns and processes. They may also suggest sources of information about specific individuals. One such history is—

Bolognani, Bonifacio. [A Courageous People from the Dolomites: The Immigrants from Trentino](#). Trento, Italy: Province of Trent, 1981. (FHL book 973 F2b.) While they may not help localize the surname, histories may identify regions from which most emigration took place. Local histories are even more helpful. Many early emigrants (especially before the 1850s) left from small areas within the old country and settled together in the same area of the new country. Local histories often include lists of local inhabitants who emigrated or indicate places they settled in the new country. Even without names of emigrants, local histories usually include the names of many local families. They are an easily searched source that may identify an individual emigrant, or at least help localize the surname. Particularly useful town histories include the Norwegian *bygdbøker* and German *Ortssippenbücher* (especially for Baden). Of course, local histories can only be useful if you know where the emigrant came from. However, they are easier to search (when available) than most other local records.

Land and Property If the emigrant owned property in the country of origin and sold it before emigrating, land and property records may reveal the place of origin. In countries where deeds and other land transactions were registered, indexes of grantors list emigrants selling property. Since most countries do not have nationwide land indexes, use this source after you know where the emigrant left from.

Even if an immigrant did not own land, land and property records could be helpful if the immigrant

was a tenant on an estate and was helped by the land owner to emigrate. For example, during the great potato famine in Ireland, land owners found it easier to help their impoverished tenants emigrate rather than feed, clothe, and house them. To see what records are available, look in the Locality section of the Family History Library Catalog under [COUNTRY] - LAND AND PROPERTY.

An example of land and property records is—

Mitchell Brian. *Irish Emigration Lists 1833-1839: Lists of Emigrants Extracted from the Ordinance Survey Memoirs for Counties Londonderry and Antrim*. Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co., 1989. (FHL book 941.6 W2m.)

Military Records For most countries, military records provide—

The birthplace or place of residence.

Names of parent(s), wife, or both.

Age.

Physical description.

Rank, promotions, and military service.

Occupation.

Military records can be a valuable tool for learning the origins of emigrants. However, most military records are not indexed, and they are often inaccessible or organized in a way that makes research impractical.

Military Service before Emigration. Military service was required of most young men in many countries. Although some emigrants left to avoid serving in the military, most emigrated after fulfilling their military duty. For this reason, and because they are usually kept by country, military records are often an excellent place to seek an emigrant's origin if you know only the country. For example, many British soldiers moved to Canada after their discharge. These records are in British sources. Many European military records have been microfilmed, including thousands of rolls of Austrian Empire records from the Vienna War Archives. The Austrian records include 673 rolls of individual muster sheets. Generally you must know the soldier's regiment to search the records. Family records, such as photographs and certificates of military release, may prove an emigrant was in the military and identify which regiment. A useful reference for determining which British regiments were in certain places at certain times is—

Kitzmiller, John. *In Search of the Forlorn Hope*. 2 vols. Salt Lake City, Utah: Manuscript Publishing Co., 1988. (FHL book 942 M2kj.)

Emigration During Military Service. Some emigrants settled in a new country during or immediately after serving there in their homeland's military. Local histories may identify immigrants as former soldiers. In such cases, search the military records of the country of origin, specifically looking for references to deserters. A growing number of such references are being published. An excellent example is—

Hessische Truppen in Amerikanischen Unabhängigkeitskrieg (HETRINA) [*Hessian Troops in the American Revolution*]. 6 vols. Marburg, Germany: Institut für Archivwissenschaft, 1972-87. (FHL book 973 M2mg.)

Names, Personal Surname books and other similar sources may provide places of origin for family names, but they are not available for every country. Such books are especially useful for localizing the surname. Examples of surname books for Switzerland and the Netherlands are—

Meier, Emil, et al. *Familiennamenbuch Der Schweiz* [*Register of Swiss Surnames*]. 3rd ed. Zürich, Switzerland: Polygraphischer Verlag, 1989. (FHL book Ref. 949.4 D4f 1989 vols. 1-3.) The register of surnames contains the names of families that had citizenship in a Swiss community in 1962. The families

are listed by the canton and village of origin and give the date when the family name first appears. Meertens, Dr. P.J. Ed. [Nederlands Repertorium van Familienamen](#) [Bibliography of Dutch Family Names]. Several vols. Assen, Netherlands: Van Gorcum & Comp. N.V., 1963. (FHL book 949.2 D4n.) Volumes for each province and several larger cities are available. Etymology books study the origins of words. Name etymologies help identify the region a name comes from, its meaning, and common spelling variations. For less common surnames, these books may help localize the surname. Etymologies exist for most major countries of origin. A useful etymology for German names is— Bahlow, Hans. [Deutsches Namenlexikon](#) [German Name Dictionary]. München: Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1972. (FHL book 943 D4ba.)

Newspapers Current newspapers can help you find living relatives of an ancestor. Find a newspaper that covers the area you think the emigrant came from. If you only know the country, find a newspaper with as wide a coverage as possible. If you know a county or state, choose a newspaper that covers that area. Directories of newspapers are available for most countries. They tell the coverage of the paper and give addresses. One such directory is—

Benn's Media Directory International. Tonbridge, Kent, England: Benn Business Information Services. Place an advertisement or ask the editor to run an article in the newspaper requesting information on relatives of an emigrant or anyone having information about an emigrant. Sometimes living relatives of your ancestor will respond. Write to the newspaper first to determine prices and procedures. The editor of a local paper may take an interest in your story and publish it at no cost to you. If a foreign language is involved, you might need to have the letter or advertisement translated.

Newspapers published at the time the ancestor left the country of origin may identify the emigrant's origin. In some areas, newspapers listed people who were leaving. Newspapers may also contain advertisements for missing people, runaways, or people who emigrated without the family's knowledge. Many newspapers refer to births, marriages, and deaths. These have often been indexed. Newspapers with large coverage or from earlier time periods are less likely to mention people from lower social classes. Copies of old newspapers and indexes to the newspapers are generally found in libraries, record offices, or national archives. A directory or bibliography of newspapers identifies what newspapers exist or existed. Some professional researchers who specialize in tracing emigrants keep files of newspaper announcements. They usually advertize in genealogical periodicals.

Periodicals Periodicals published by genealogical or historical societies in the country of origin can help you trace an emigrant's origin. Periodicals are most helpful if you know which region in the country your ancestor is from. Most periodicals cover a county or state within a country and generally deal with only the records and the people of that area. The articles of particular interest to tracing emigrants include lists of surnames members are researching, inquiries, departure lists, and indexes.

Many periodicals have a section where society members (and sometimes others) place inquiries asking for information on a particular ancestor. This is a way to find living relatives and others who are tracing the same family. It is often free for members, but there is usually a fee for nonmembers. You can either place an inquiry or look for inquiries in previous issues that might be about your ancestors. Many periodicals contain indexes to various types of records. Some have indexes to people leaving an area or country. You will find periodicals in many libraries, archives, and record offices. Some bibliographies list genealogical periodicals. Genealogical society directories list organizations likely to publish genealogical periodicals. The Family History Library's research outlines for various countries and states identify major periodicals and any significant indexes to periodicals of that country or state.

Population Some countries kept records of their citizens, temporary residents, and transients. This was especially true in large cities and seaports. The Family History Library has few of these records. However, if you know where the emigrant lived or the port he or she left from, write to the city or regional archives to see if such records are available.

Police Registration. In Germany and other European countries, the police registered citizens and transients. The Family History Library has registers of transients in Hamburg that give places of origin. You need to know the year the emigrant was in Hamburg to use the indexes to these records.

Hotel Registers. Some seaports and larger cities kept hotel registers of temporary residents and transients, including those awaiting emigration. The Family History Library does not have these records, but you can write to local archives and see if they exist for your seaport. For example, in Antwerp, Belgium, hotel registers were kept (with gaps) from 1834 to 1898. These are located at the Municipal Archives in Antwerp.

Population Registers. Population registers, similar to ongoing household censuses, were kept in Belgium and in the Netherlands. They can be extremely valuable in determining places of origin when families moved frequently. They list birthplaces or previous residences, but they can usually only be used if you know where the family lived.

Probate Records Probate records in the country of origin can be a very valuable source for finding the emigrant's place of origin. Probate jurisdictions covered wide areas, and the records are usually well indexed. If the emigrant still held property in the homeland when he or she died, a probate record should exist in the records of that country. If the emigrant still had family in the country of origin, he or she may be named in a relative's probate.

Published probate information is often available for early years in both the country of origin and the country of arrival. Excellent examples include—

Coldham, Peter Wilson. [English Estates of American Colonists: American Wills and Administrations in the Prerogative Court of Canterbury, 1610-1857](#). Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co., 1980-81. (FHL book 942 P2cpw.)

Waters, Henry F. [Genealogical Gleanings in England: Abstracts of Wills Relating to Early American Families](#). 2 vols., reprint 1901, 1907. Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co., 1981. (FHL book 942 D2wh 1981). South Africa maintained death notices that were included in a deceased person's estate file. These are full of information such as the deceased's place of birth or origin, parents' names, and children's names. They are easily accessible due to their arrangement.

Societies Genealogical and historical societies can help you find an ancestor's place of origin. They are usually helpful if a request takes into account the staff's (usually volunteers) limited services, budget, and time. Through a society, you can find living relatives, others researching the same family, and records or indexes revealing your ancestor's place of origin.

Some societies, such as the Institut für pfälzische Geschichte und Volkskunde [Institute for Palatine History and Folk Culture] (Benzinoring 6, Postfach 2860, W-6750 Kaiserslautern, Germany) maintain files of emigrants from the area the society is interested in. Important directories of societies include—Johnson, Keith A., and Malcolm R. Sainty, eds. [Genealogical Research Directory...and Guide to Genealogical Societies](#).

Thode, Ernest. [Address Book for Germanic Genealogy](#). 4th ed. Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co., 1991. (FHL book 943 D27t.)

Taxation Tax records can substitute for census records to find where families with a selected surname are most concentrated. For example, the [Ireland Householders Index](#) helps locate families in the absence of a general census. It indexes two sets of tax records, the Tithe Applotment books (1820-1840) and Griffith's Land Valuation books (1840-1860). Both records identify where heads of households were living.

Vital Records See “Civil Registration.”

FOR FURTHER READING

- Daniels, Roger. *Coming to America: A History of Immigration and Ethnicity in American Life*. New York: Harper Collins, 1990. (FHL book 973 W2ro.)
- Eakle, Arlene, and Johni Cerni, eds. "Tracking Immigrant Origins." Chapter 15 in *The Source: A Guidebook of American Genealogy*. Salt Lake City, Utah: Ancestry, 1984. (FHL book 973 D27ts.)
- Kurzweil, Arthur. *From Generation to Generation: How to Trace Your Jewish Genealogy and Personal History*. New York: William Morrow, 1980. (FHL book 929.1 K967f; film 1,059,468 item 4.)
- Law, Hugh T. *How to Trace Your Ancestors to Europe*. Salt Lake City, Utah: Cottonwood Books, 1987. (FHL 940 D27L.) This book contains stories of people who traced their ancestors' origins.
- Rose, James, and Alice Eichholz, eds. *Black Genesis*. Detroit: Gale Research Co., 1978. (FHL book 973 F27r.) A few pages mention slave trade records that substitute for passenger lists.
- Smith, Jessie Carney. *Ethnic Genealogy: A Research Guide*. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1983. (FHL book 973 D27sj.) Includes Asian-American, African-American, and Hispanic-American sources.
- Tan, Thomas Tsu-wee. *Your Chinese Roots: The Overseas Chinese Story*. Singapore: Times Books International, 1986. (FHL book 973 F2tt.)
- Webster's New Geographical Dictionary*. Springfield, Mass.: G. and C. Merriam Co., 1988. (FHL book 910.3 W395g.) This gazetteer of world place-names includes historical information for regions and places.
- Wellauer, Maralyn Ann. *German Immigration to America in the Nineteenth Century: A Genealogist's Guide*. Milwaukee: Roots International, 1985. (FHL book 973 W2we.)
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