

Genealogy Basics – Using Ancestry’s Passenger, Crew and Arrival Records

By Joe Petrie

BACKGROUND:

Ancestry states that passenger arrival lists are among the most highly prized records for documenting an ancestor’s immigration because of the significance of that move. Lists were not kept for every ship and some have been lost, but those that survive are becoming increasingly available online and new indexes afford us much better access to them. Because the forms used for passenger arrival records for the most part weren’t standardized until the twentieth century, earlier records will vary in content, but even the earliest records have a story to tell when you put them in the context of history, your family, and the journey itself.

Early passenger lists typically include the name of the ship, the names of passengers, ages, ports of arrival and departure, date, country of origin, and occupation.

20th century lists include even more details, giving the town or county of origin, and the names of other family members, destination, physical description, and more. Passenger lists are typically used by family historians to document their immigrant ancestor’s trip to their new country, but don’t overlook the possibility of finding ancestors who were visiting relatives, traveling for business, or for pleasure.

Ancestry gives the user the following search tips.

- Search for your ancestors by name, narrowing the search with their age, dates of arrival, ports of departure or arrival, or country of origin.
- Keep in mind that your immigrant ancestor may not have used the English version of his or her given name and that the surname may also have ethnic variants. Learn the ethnic equivalents and try searches in the immigrant’s native language.
- Learn about pronunciation in your immigrant ancestor’s native language. In some cases clerks may have recorded the name as they heard it.
- Try searching for other variations of your ancestor’s name in case it was spelled incorrectly. Wildcards can be used to search for name variants
- If your U.S. immigrant ancestor was alive after 1900, locate them in the 1900, 1910, 1920, or 1930 U.S. census and look for the column that gives the year of immigration. Use that information to narrow your search of passenger arrival records by entering it in the field for *Migration Arrival*.
- Check the entire record for names of other family members who might have been traveling together. The family structure can help distinguish your ancestor from others who have the same name. Remember though that the family may not have traveled together. It was not uncommon for one or two members to come over first and then send for the rest of the family once they had secured work and a place to live.
- Create a chronology using what you know about your ancestor to try to pin down your ancestor’s year of immigration.
- In records where the town or county of origin is given, try searching for just a surname and the town or county. You may find other family members that came over at various times.
- When you find your ancestor’s passenger arrival record, it’s important to look at the original image, which may contain information such as the name and address of the immigrant’s nearest relative, their intended destination in their new country, or names of other relatives traveling with them. If you find a record in an index collection or a transcription, check the database description and accompanying articles for information on how to find out how to order the original record, provided it still exists.
- Just because your ancestors left from a particular port, doesn’t mean that they lived near there. Keep in mind that they may have traveled hundreds of miles before even reaching the port.

- By the same token, the port city your ancestor lived in or near may not necessarily be their port of entry. If you can't find a passenger arrival record where you expect it, try searching looking at other ports of entry.
- Check for multiple arrivals. Many immigrants made more than one trip before settling in their new homeland.
- For U.S. immigrants, you may even find that your immigrant ancestor arrived in North America through a Canadian port. For many years, it was cheaper to travel to Canada than the U.S. If you're unable to locate your ancestor, you'll want to search for him or her in Canadian Passenger Arrivals, 1865-1935, Canada, Ocean Arrivals (Form 30A), 1919-1924, and Border Crossings: From Canada to U.S., 1895-1956.

I also recommend searching Ancestry's U.S., Records of Aliens Pre-Examined in Canada, 1904-1954. Halifax was one of three ports which pre-examined aliens.

INTRODUCTION:

As of April 6, 2017, Ancestry has nearly 40 databases for passenger, passenger and crew, and arrivals.

I'll focus on only one of the databases. Specifically, I'll focus on the Massachusetts Passenger and Crew list for only two families: my Glace Bay, Cape Breton mother and my wife's Irish Veale collateral ancestors from Aglish, County Waterford and from Ballyphilip West, County Waterford. The latter is important because the Massachusetts passenger and crew image for my wife's granduncle, John Joseph McGrath, showed that he was accompanied by his aunt Nora Veale and that he was going to his uncle Peter Veale's residence in Roxbury, Boston, Massachusetts.

ETHEL TOBIN PETRIE (ALSO KNOWN AS ELIZABETH LORETTA TOBIN, LORETTA ELIZABETH TOBIN AND LORRETTA ELIZABETH TOBIN):

For years, I searched in vain for my Mother's arrival record. For years, I kiddingly told people that Mom may have been an illegal immigrant. Last year, I finally found her record in Ancestry's U.S., Records of Aliens Pre-Examined in Canada, 1904-1954. She was listed as Elizabeth Loretta Tobin. The image showed a second name: Loretta Elizabeth Tobin. The record did not show the ship's name and date of arrival.

The arrival date for Elizabeth Loretta Tobin was in Ancestry's U.S., Passenger and Crew Lists for U.S.-Bound Vessels Arriving in Canada, 1912-1939 and 1953-1962. The following is the transcript.

Name:	Elizabeth Loretta Tobin
Gender:	Female
Nationality:	Canadian
Arrival Age:	22
Birth Date:	abt 1904
Birth Place:	? Bone, Nova Scotia
Arrival Date:	2 Oct 1926
Arrival Port:	Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada

Please note that on the passenger manifest there were two names, Loretta Elizabeth was the second name.

Also, please note that there was a transcription error of Mom's passenger manifest; i.e., Glace Bay was incorrectly transcribed.

When the Ancestry Massachusetts and Federal Naturalization database was released, the image showed that the ship was the Northland. Mom showed her arrival date as 5 October 1926.

JOHN JOSEPH MCGRATH OF BALLYPHILIP, KILCOCKAN, WATERFORD COUNTY IRELAND:

John Joseph McGrath was the eldest son of William McGrath and Margaret Veale. Margaret was the eldest child on Michael Veale and Ellen Clancy. Two of Margaret's sibling were Peter and Nora.

His Ancestry Passenger and Crew List transcript follows:

Jno (John) McGrath in the Massachusetts, Passenger and Crew Lists, 1820-1963

Name: Jno Mc Grath
 Gender: Male
 Age: 19
 Birth Date: abt 1883
 Departure Place: Queenstown, Ireland
 Arrival Date: 18 Sep 1902
 Arrival Place: Boston, Massachusetts, USA
 Last Residence: Tallow
 Friend: Peter Veale
 Ship: New England

The following is a portion of the Passenger Manifest for the New England. Nora Veale is passenger 59767 and John McGrath is passenger 59768. Nora was John's aunt. Peter Veale was his uncle. The last column shows that Peter was residing at 4 Dimmock St in Roxbury.

No.	Name	Age	Sex	Rank	Place of Birth	Place of Origin	Remarks
9889	Jno McGrath	25	M	Passenger	Queenstown	Ireland	
9890	Nora Veale	24	F	Passenger	Queenstown	Ireland	
9891	Peter Veale	27	M	Passenger	Queenstown	Ireland	4 Dimmock St Roxbury

Peter Veals in the Massachusetts, Passenger and Crew Lists, 1820-1963

Name: Peter Veals
 Gender: Male
 Age: 20
 Birth Date: abt 1871
 Departure Place: Queenstown Ireland and Liverpool England, Ireland and Liverpool England
 Arrival Date: 18 May 1891
 Arrival Place: Boston, Massachusetts, USA
 Ship: Scythia

SUMMARY:

Ancestry states that passenger arrival lists are among the most highly prized records for documenting an ancestor's immigration because of the significance of that move. Highly prized may be an understatement.

#

Your corrections, comments and suggestions are appreciated. Please Email me at:

joe-apg@norwoodlight.com .

Joseph F. Petrie, AB (Economics and Business – St. Anselm College, 1962)
MA (Economics – Boston College, 1967)
Doctoral Program, (Economics – Boston College, 1963 – 1967)

Founding Member, Friends of Irish Research (FIR)
Faculty, Friends of Irish Research School of Irish Genealogy
Member, Cape Breton Genealogy and Historical Association (CBGHA)
Member, Family History Society of Newfoundland and Labrador (FHSNL)
Member, Association of Professional Genealogists (APG)
Member, New England Historic Genealogical Society (NEHGS)
Volunteer Research Correspondent, Cape Breton Genealogy and Historical Association (CBGHA)
Member, Friends of Morrill Memorial Library, Norwood, MA
Resident Genealogy Volunteer, Morrill Memorial Library, Norwood, MA
Genealogy Volunteer, St Anselm College, Manchester NH
Genealogy Volunteer, Fiske Library, Wrentham MA
Genealogy Volunteer, Irish Cultural Centre of New England for the Friends of Irish Research,
Genealogy Volunteer, Irish Cultural Centre of New England, Irish Fest, 2016, Canton MA