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Tracing Immigrant Origins

Shari Golden mgc@mymcpl.org

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This class will focus on 6 specific research options that may help you learn more about your immigrant ancestors: family sources, previous research, U.S. records, emigration/immigration records, naturalization records, and relatives/neighbors.

Search: Family Sources

- a. Talk to family members
 - i. Record biographical/genealogical info such as birthdates/places, names of family members, etc.
 - ii. Collect *their* family stories using open-ended questions that encourage elaboration and storytelling. Ex. What family stories do you recall hearing about ancestors born outside the U.S.? Do you remember any family traditions celebrated when you were younger?
 - iii. Preserve these interviews whenever possible using video cameras, cell phone technology, or MGC “Tell Me A Story” kits.
- b. Review family records, photos, and other keepsakes
 - i. Use family “treasures” to learn more about the family and its history and to establish timelines for your immigrant ancestors.

II. Search: Previous Research

- a. Review the research done by others, paying particular attention to the sources/records they’ve used to support their findings.
- b. Use published resources – family histories, biographies, county histories, etc. – to locate key documents and uncover new research paths.
 - i. ONLINE – Take advantage of free access to digitized publications at the Internet Archive (<https://archive.org>) , Digital Public Library of America (<https://dp.la>) , Google Books, FamilySearch Digital Library (<https://www.familysearch.org/library/books/>), and various state and county websites
 1. Online Tip: Digital State Archives offers links to state-level archives for all 50 states!
(<https://sites.google.com/site/statearchives/home>)
 - ii. ON-SITE – Check the collections at genealogy libraries (like the Midwest Genealogy Center) and at libraries and genealogical / historical societies located in communities where your immigrant ancestors once lived.
- c. Review periodicals – magazines, journals, and newsletters – to find unique local and regional records

III. Search: U.S. Records

- a. Work present to past, gathering as many clues as you can from U.S. records before extending your research to your immigrant ancestor's country of origin.
- b. *Essential* pre-immigration info? Your ancestor's hometown!
- c. Basic U.S. Record Types:
 - i. Census – U.S. Federal Census, state and territorial censuses
 1. Gather information such as age, birthplaces (for respondents and sometimes their parents), language spoken, etc.
 2. Immigration year/years in the U.S. and naturalization status are included in all U.S. Federal Censuses from 1890 – 1930. The 1920 U.S. Federal Census asked respondents to provide their actual **year** of naturalization!
 3. Follow immigrant ancestors from census to census to create timeline for that ancestor and their family.
 - ii. Military
 1. Draft records
 - a. All U.S. men were required to register for both WWI and II.
 - b. WWII draft registrations asked for exact place of birth; some WWI registrations asked exact date of birth.
 - c. WWI draft done in 3 registrations. The 2nd registration – for men born 6 Jun 1896 to 5 Jun 1897 – requested the father's place of birth.
 - d. DRAFT records include individuals who served plus those who were drafted but never called into service.
Men/women who ENLISTED will not have draft records.
 2. Service records
 - a. Can include name, residence, birth information, physical description, enlistment and discharge dates, injuries or illnesses, assignments, rank and appointments, disabilities, and more.
 3. Post-service records
 - a. Can include discharge papers, veteran benefits, etc.
 4. Online Tip: Review NARA's "Genealogy in Military Records" page (<https://archives.gov/research/military/genealogy>)
 - iii. Newspapers
 1. Search local newspapers in areas where your ancestor lived, including local ethnic, religious, and trade newspapers.
 2. Look for obituaries, newsy articles, and probate notices.
 3. Contact the libraries in communities where your ancestors lived to learn about their newspaper collections, and ask **your** local library, genealogy or historical society about their own newspaper holdings, including access to online and microfilmed papers. MCPL cardholders, for example, can access more than 2 dozen newspaper databases from home through the MGC website, and we also have an extensive collection of newspapers on microfilm.

4. Online Tip: ChroniclingAmerica! Millions of digitized newspapers images dating back into the 1700s + the U.S. Newspaper Directory (<https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov>)
- iv. Vital Records – birth, marriage, death
 1. Look for dates and places of birth/death, names and birthplaces of parents, names of witnesses (esp. Catholic marriages) who may have been extended family, names of churches/parishes/synagogues and burial locations.
- v. Church
 1. Did your ancestor's church have a homeland connection?
 2. Was their church local or did they travel a distance to attend?
- vi. Cemetery
 1. Check online sites for tombstone images.
 2. Contact cemeteries & funeral homes for burial records.
 3. Review published cemetery books/records. Since many tombstones have eroded and weathered over time, older published resources may contain the only record of the information once found on the marker.
- vii. Probate
 1. In addition to immediate heirs listed in probate documents, look to see if the deceased left money/property to relatives "back home" and to see if their estate included property overseas.

IV. Search: Emigration & Immigration Records

- a. Emigration records include permission to emigrate, passports, lists of transported prisoners, and emigration registers to name a few.
 - i. Information varies greatly, but may include name, age, address, destination, passenger fees, occupation, etc.
 - ii. Expect the record to be in the native language of that location.
- b. Immigration record searches focus primarily on passenger lists.
 - i. Passenger lists were not required before 1820, and prior to 1890, each state handled its own immigration registrations.
 - ii. Immigration Act of 1891 provided for medical exams, leading to the establishment of Ellis Island – the major port of entry from its opening in 1892 to 1954. Other major ports of immigration from the early 1800s to the mid-1900s included Baltimore, Boston, Philadelphia, and New Orleans, plus the ports of Charleston, Galveston, and San Francisco.
 - iii. The *Passenger and Immigration Lists Index* is a multi-volume index to published records of millions of immigrants who entered U.S. and Canadian ports from the 1500s through the 1900s. MGC and many other libraries maintain hardcopy of this resource for customer use. This index is also available online on MyHeritageLE and Ancestry.com.
 - iv. Passenger lists prior to 1906 typically have minimal information; after 1906, lists were often much more detailed.
 - v. Remember to check for "bonus" pages and supplementary info such as lists of births, deaths, marriages, etc. often found at the **end** of the manifest. Also remember that in some countries, women maintained

their maiden names even after they married, so you may need to search more than one surname.

- vi. Online Tips: In addition to Ancestry (Library Edition or .com) and FamilySearch, look for additional records on Steve Morse One-Step (<http://stevemorse.org>). For ancestors believed to enter the U.S. through New York harbor, search both Ellis Island and Castle Garden passenger lists at <http://www.statueofliberty.org/>, or, to learn more about the NYC records maintained by NARA, go to <https://www.archives.gov/nyc/finding-aids/passenger-lists.html>

V. Search: Naturalization Records

- a. Laws changed over time, but mostly followed the “2-step, 5-year” rule
 - i. Year of entry + 2 years = file First Papers/Declaration of Intent
 - ii. 3 years later = eligible to Petition for Naturalization (Second Papers).
After this petition was granted, they received a certificate of citizenship.
- b. U.S. Federal Census codes: AL = Alien, PA = First Papers, NA = Naturalized
- c. Prior to 1906 – naturalize in any federal, state, county, or municipal court
- d. After 1906 – courts forwarded copies to the Immigration & Naturalization Service (INS), now called U.S. Citizenship & Immigration Services (USCIS)
- e. Women & Children
 - i. 1855 – 1922: Women took their husband’s citizenship during these years (with some exceptions).
 - ii. Prior to 1906: A woman may/may not be listed on her husband’s naturalization papers.
 - iii. 1907 – 1922: U.S. women marrying aliens lost their U.S. citizenship.
 - iv. 1922 Cable Act required women to have a citizenship of their own.
 - v. Prior to 1934: Children under 21 took on their father’s citizenship.
- f. Online Tips: Learn more about U.S. immigration laws/policies at
 - i. www.archives.gov/research/immigration/naturalization
 - ii. www.uscis.gov/about-us/our-history/overview-of-ins-history/early-american-immigration-policies

VI. Search: Relatives & Neighbors

- a. Elizabeth Shown Mills – FAN Principle – Friends, Associates, and Neighbors
- b. Immigrants often traveled in groups and settled together, joining others already established in the new country who shared their language, cultural traditions, religion, etc.
- c. Learning more about your immigrant ancestor’s neighbors – especially those sharing a residence with your ancestor – may offer clues about your ancestor’s origins.
- d. Also check the records of heritage societies and fraternal organizations that your immigrant ancestors might have joined over time.
 - i. Applications = information!
 - ii. Societies often have publications (newsletters) that may be useful to your research.