



Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Ship Passenger Records, ca. 1977–2010 Collection CGIC

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Contents

I. Questions about the Ship Passenger Records.....	2
I.1. What information is in these records?	2
I.2. Why were these records created?.....	2
I.3. What are the passenger data files and the manifest header file?	2
I.4. What passenger lists are available on AAD?	2
I.5. How are the passenger list files related and how do they differ?	3
I.6. What happened to the prior set of passenger list records that were available on AAD?	4
I.7. I found an error in one of the passenger records available on AAD. Can it be corrected?	5
I.8. Why do some fields say “Undefined Code?”	5
I.9. What is the [Family Relation Code] field in the Records of Passengers from Ireland and the United Kingdom?	5
I.10. Why do some records have blank first and/or last names, or "unknown" or incomplete names? ..	5
I.11. Is there a difference between country of departure and country of birth in the passenger records files? Is there a difference between the port of departure in the Manifest Header Records file and the country of departure in the passenger records files?.....	6
I.12. How can I access the full files?.....	6
II. Questions about searching the Ship Passenger Records	7
II.1. How do I find records?.....	7
II.2. How can I retrieve all the passenger records for a ship?.....	7
II.3. Why can't I locate any passenger records for a specific ship (i.e. the manifest identification number)?	7
II.4. How can I search these passenger records by arrival date?.....	8
II.5. How can I search for a name that includes diacritics (e.g. accent marks)? Why is a name with accented letters not displayed correctly?	8
III. Questions about obtaining copies of original passenger lists (ship manifests).....	8
III.1. How can I obtain copies of the original passenger lists or ship's manifests?	8

I. Questions about the Ship Passenger Records

I.1. What information is in these records?

This series contains information about passengers who arrived in the United States by ship between 1820 and 1912. The records were extracted from ship passenger lists in the Records of the U.S. Customs Service (Record Group 36). The series includes passenger lists for four separate geographic areas: Italy; the United Kingdom and Ireland; Germany, France, and Switzerland; and Russian Empire, Austria-Hungary, the Netherlands, Scandinavia, and Other European Countries. The lists contain passenger information such as name, age, marital status, place of last residence, and destination. This series also includes a ship manifest file and code tables which explain the values recorded in the passenger lists.

I.2. Why were these records created?

The Castle Garden Immigration Center (CGIC) created this series to promote access to information about immigration to the United States. Most information was extracted from ship passenger lists in the records of the U.S. Customs Service (NARA Record Group 36).

I.3. What are the passenger data files and the manifest header file?

Passenger records may include a passenger name, age, town of last residence, destination, and codes for passenger's sex, occupation, literacy, country of origin, transit and/or travel compartment, and the manifest identification number for the ship.

For information about each ship, such as date of arrival, you must search the Manifest Header File using the manifest identification number listed in the passenger record.

The manifest header file contains information on the ships and includes the ship manifest identification number, the name of the ship, the code for its port of departure, and date of arrival. The ship manifest identification number indicates the port of arrival (see below). The manifest header file applies to all four sets of passenger records.

To locate records of passengers on a ship, you must search within a passenger data file using the manifest identification number listed in the manifest header record.

See also question [II.1. How do I find records?](#)

I.4. What passenger lists are available on AAD?

There are four lists of passengers available on AAD:

- German, French, and Swiss Passengers Records, for the years 7/12/1820 - 11/10/1907

- Italian Passenger Records, for the years 6/4/1830 - 12/31/1912
- Records of Passengers from Ireland and the United Kingdom, for the years 9/3/1832 - 4/7/1902
- Records of Passengers from the Russian Empire, Austria-Hungary, the Netherlands, Scandinavia, and Other European Countries, for the years 1/1/1820 - 9/23/1902

The Manifest Header Records file contains records of ships for the years 1/1/1820 - 12/31/1912.

See also question [I.6. What happened to the prior set of passenger list records that were available on AAD?](#)

I.5. How are the passenger list files related and how do they differ?

The passenger list files primarily differ in the time period of the records and the "nationality" or countries of origin for the majority of the passenger records in each file. However, each file also includes records for passengers listing a variety of countries or places for country of origin.

These passenger data files were organized by the ship's port of departure and/or the passengers' nationalities. In other words, passengers on a ship departing one country may be listed in the different passenger records files based on their nationality or in just one passenger records file based on the port of departure. Researchers may need to search all the various passenger records files, regardless of the identified nationalities, because each of the passenger records files contain passenger records of a variety of nationalities on ships leaving ports from other various countries.

For example, the ship Oregon departed Havre, France, and arrived in New York on June 8, 1824 (manifest identification number 24011). The 111 passengers for this voyage (i.e. passenger records with manifest identification number 24011) only appear in the German, French, and Swiss Passengers Records file. Of these passengers, 93 listed Germany as their country of departure and country of birth, and 15 listed Great Britain as their country of departure and country of birth.

In another example, the ship London departed London, England, and arrived in New York on May 19, 1852 (manifest identification number 6940). 73 passengers on this voyage are in the Records of Passengers from Ireland and the United Kingdom file. Most of these passengers list England or Ireland as their country of departure and country of birth, but five of the passengers list France. There are an additional 224 passengers for this voyage in the German, French, and Swiss Passengers Records file. These passengers have either Germany or France as their country of departure and country of birth.

See also [II.2. How can I retrieve all the passenger records for a ship?](#)

I.6. What happened to the prior set of passenger list records that were available on AAD?

NARA previously made four files of passenger records, created by the Temple University-Balch Institute Center for Immigration Research, available on AAD:

- Data Files Relating to the Immigration of Germans to the United States, for the years 1850 – 1897 (National Archives Identifier 566634)
- Data Files Relating to the Immigration of Italians to the United States, for the years 1855 – 1900 (National Archives Identifier 566637)
- Data Files Relating to the Immigration of Russians to the United States, for the years 1834 – 1897 (National Archives Identifier 566638)
- Records for Passengers Who Arrived at the Port of New York During the Irish Famine, for the period 1/12/1846 - 12/31/1851 (National Archives Identifier 569666)

The Castle Garden Immigration Center expanded upon the electronic passenger list records originally compiled by the Center for Immigration Research to create the version of these passenger lists records currently available on AAD. The Castle Garden files include the records for the same individuals that appear in the Center for Immigration Research files plus over 5 million additional passenger list records. The Castle Garden files may also include more information about the passengers, as they include additional fields not captured in the earlier version.

The Castle Garden Immigration Center Manifest Header Records has 7,002 more ship records compared to the Center for Immigration Research version.

Researchers may download the Center for Immigration Research versions of these passenger list files and manifest header files from the National Archives Catalog at: <https://catalog.archives.gov/>. Below are the file unit descriptions that list the electronic records and technical documentation available for viewing and/or downloading.

- Famine Irish Passenger Record Data File (FIPAS)
<https://catalog.archives.gov/id/609801>
- Germans to America Passenger Data File, 1850 – 1897
<https://catalog.archives.gov/id/1746067>
- Italians to America Passenger Data File, 1855 – 1900
<https://catalog.archives.gov/id/1746097>
- Russians to America Passenger Data File, 1834 – 1897
<https://catalog.archives.gov/id/1746337>

Please keep in mind that the data files consist of the raw structured data as was loaded into AAD (i.e. the coded values without meanings), but without the AAD software that displays the

meanings for coded values and field titles. For more details about using files containing raw structured data, you may wish to review our "Introduction to Raw Data" at: <https://www.archives.gov/files/research/electronic-records/raw-data-intro.pdf>.

Additional information about downloading electronic records from the Catalog is available at: <https://www.archives.gov/research/electronic-records/access-in-catalog-faqs>.

I.7. I found an error in one of the passenger records available on AAD. Can it be corrected?

No. We are aware there may be errors in some of the passenger records and the records on the ships. The donors created these electronic versions of the passenger records by transcribing extracts from the original passenger lists (ship manifests). Errors may have been introduced during the transcription process and it is also possible the information was recorded incorrectly on the original passenger lists. As an archives, NARA's role is to preserve the integrity of the records that Federal agencies transfer and organizations donate for archival preservation, even if the records include objective inaccuracies. For that reason, NARA does not correct or revise accessioned records.

I.8. Why do some fields say "Undefined Code?"

A meaning of "Undefined Code" indicates a value or code whose meaning is unknown or undefined in the donated materials.

I.9. What is the [Family Relation Code] field in the Records of Passengers from Ireland and the United Kingdom?

The donors did not identify this field as part of the Records of Passengers from Ireland and the United Kingdom. When processing the records, NARA found seemingly errant letters such as D, S, T, B affixed to the first name field in 10,622 records. When comparing these records to those in the earlier donation of passenger records, staff determined these letters were the codes for the Family Relation field. In the reference version of the file, staff created a separate field for these codes and applied the family relation code list provided in the earlier donation of these passenger records. This affects about 1% of the records only in the Records of Passengers from Ireland and the United Kingdom file.

I.10. Why do some records have blank first and/or last names, or "unknown" or incomplete names?

The information in these records was taken from the original paper passenger lists (ship manifests). It is possible the names in the original manifests were incomplete, missing, or illegible at the time of data capture. Where a first or last name was unknown, the fields may contain "Unknown" or "U". It is also possible UNKN may stand for "unknown." Names may

contain placeholder characters where the letters could not be determined. Common placeholder characters include periods (.), question marks (?), and hyphens (-). Note in some cases the hyphen may be part of the name rather than representing an unknown letter.

I.11. Is there a difference between country of departure and country of birth in the passenger records files? Is there a difference between the port of departure in the Manifest Header Records file and the country of departure in the passenger records files?

Yes, there may be a difference between country of departure and country of birth. The passenger records include a field for country of departure and country of birth. It is possible for an individual to have departed from a country other than that of their birth. For example, in the Records of Passengers from the Russian Empire, Austria-Hungary, the Netherlands, Scandinavia, and Other European Countries, there are records of individuals who list Russia as the country of departure, but have Ukraine, Poland, Finland, or Lithuania as their country of birth.

The port of departure in the Manifest Header Records file is where the ship left whereas the country of departure in the passenger records files reflects the country the individual was leaving. Some passengers traveled to ports outside their native country so not all passengers on a ship were necessarily born in or departing the same country as the ship's port of departure.

I.12. How can I access the full files?

The raw data files, along with the associated technical documentation, may be downloaded from the National Archives Catalog at: <https://catalog.archives.gov/>. There you can search by the series name, Ship Passenger Records, or using the National Archives Identifier 229630476, which is the description identifier for this series.

In the results, select to view the full series description. Click on the "Search within this Series" button for a list of the file units within this series. Then select the file unit containing the records of interest to you. The file unit description will include the list of electronic records and documentation files available for viewing and/or downloading.

Additional information about downloading electronic records from the Catalog is available at: <https://www.archives.gov/research/electronic-records/access-in-catalog-faqs>.

Please keep in mind that the data file consists of the raw structured data as loaded into AAD (i.e. the coded values without meanings), but without the AAD software that displays the meanings for coded values and field titles. For more details about using files containing raw structured data, you may wish to review our "Introduction to Raw Data" at: <https://www.archives.gov/files/research/electronic-records/raw-data-intro.pdf>.

II. Questions about searching the Ship Passenger Records

II.1. How do I find records?

Searching these records is like searching other files in AAD. However, you do need to search the passenger records file(s) and the Manifest Header Records file to obtain all the related information for a passenger record.

The passenger records files contain information on the passenger, such as name and country of origin, while the Manifest Header Records file contains information on the ship, such as port of departure and date of arrival. The manifest identification number links records in the passenger records files and in the Manifest Header Records file. For example, to locate the ship information for a particular passenger record, search the Manifest Header Records file by the manifest identification number listed in the passenger record.

II.2. How can I retrieve all the passenger records for a ship?

To retrieve all the passenger records for a ship that are included in the file, search the passenger records file(s) by the manifest identification number for the ship.

Since passenger records for a specific voyage can be in one or more of the passenger records files, you can also search by the manifest identification number across all the files on the series description page. This search will return records that contain that number in any of the fields, including manifest identification number and line number, so you will need to review the results to confirm what results actually contain the specific manifest identification number.

Please note that there will not be records for all passengers for all ships.

II.3. Why can't I locate any passenger records for a specific ship (i.e. the manifest identification number)?

The Manifest Header Records file is the same for all four passenger list files, i.e. the German, French, and Swiss Passengers Records; Italian Passenger Records; the Records of Passengers from Ireland and the United Kingdom; and the Records of Passengers from the Russian Empire, Austria-Hungary, the Netherlands, Scandinavia, and Other European Countries.

However, not all the ships included in the Manifest Header Records file appear in the records of each of the passenger records files. A record of a ship may appear in one or more of the passenger records files or in none of the passenger records files. If you cannot locate passenger records for a specific ship in one passenger records file, try searching for passenger records for the ship in one of the other passenger records files. It is possible that the passenger records files do not include records for all passengers on a ship.

II.4. How can I search these passenger records by arrival date?

Because the passenger records do not have a field with arrival date information, you cannot search the passenger records by arrival date. We suggest trying to narrow your search in the passenger records as much as possible with known criteria, then sorting the search results by the Manifest Identification Number field for a list of possible manifest identification numbers, and then searching the manifest header file by the manifest identification numbers to obtain the arrival dates listed in the manifest records.

Alternatively, if you know the date or the time period of arrival, you can search for records in the manifest header file by arrival date. This will return a list of manifest identification numbers for the ships that arrived on the day specified, which you can use to limit searches in the passenger records by specific manifest identification numbers and thus arrival date.

Be aware there is a known problem when searching the date field in these records using the “before” and “on or before” search operators. To search for records with a date of arrival before a specific date select the “between” search operator, enter 01/01/1820 as the lowest date and the specific date as the highest date. There are no arrival dates prior to 01/01/1820 in the records.

II.5. How can I search for a name that includes diacritics (e.g. accent marks)? Why is a name with accented letters not displayed correctly?

AAD does not support searching on accented letters. Searches on names that include accents may return unexpected results. If the accented letter occurs after the third character, we suggest you replace any accented letters with one of AAD's recognized wildcard characters (e.g. * or %). Searches using wildcards must have at least three letters preceding the wildcard character.

Staff have found that some names in the German, French, and Swiss Passengers Records; Italian Passenger Records; and Records of Passengers from Ireland and the United Kingdom may have letters with diacritics, such as accents or other special characters. These characters may not display correctly in AAD depending on the character encoding setting in use by your browser or computer.

III. Questions about obtaining copies of original passenger lists (ship manifests)

III.1. How can I obtain copies of the original passenger lists or ship's manifests?

NARA has microfilm copies of the original passenger lists (ship manifests or passenger arrival records) available at the National Archives Building in Washington, D.C. Some of the microfilms are available at various National Archives regional facilities.

Details about passenger lists in NARA's custody are available online at:
<https://www.archives.gov/research/immigration/overview>.