

USING U.S. RECORDS TO FIND AN IMMIGRANT SURNAME AND VILLAGE OF ORIGIN

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To Find Records in “the old country,” you must have:

- Original family surname (spelled in the foreign language)
- Village of origin and its county (many villages in a country may have the same name)

Find every U.S. record that could have been created for your ancestor; possibly also his/her FAN club

Records That May Give You Name & Village

- Census (1900, 1910, 1920, 1930 ask specific immigration & naturalization questions)
- Marriage (U.S. and Religious)
- Immigration (Passenger Ship Records)
 - A Guide to Interpreting Passenger List Annotations (learn what all of those marks mean): <https://www.jewishgen.org/InfoFiles/Manifests>
 - Article: Ancestors’ names were NOT changed at Ellis Island: <https://www.jewishgen.org/infofiles/ellismythnames.html>
 - 29 Questions Asked of Immigrants at Ellis Island: <https://www.nps.gov/elis/index.htm>
 - If you know that your ancestor was on a specific ship and arrived on a specific date, you can scroll through that passenger ship record page by page, reading every name.
 - Canadian Border Crossing Documents (search St. Albans Vermont Border Corssings)
- Naturalization (Declaration of Intention & Petition for Naturalization)
 - Pre-1906: any "court of record" (municipal, county, state, or Federal) could grant U.S. citizenship
 - After 1906, all courts were required to forward copies of naturalization documents to the Immigration and Naturalization Service (now USCIS).
- Alien Registration Files
 - Does Your Ancestor Have an A-File? Search for a name in the National Archives Catalog: <https://www.archives.gov/research/catalog>; Files are at NARA, Kansas City Office
- Social Security Application (original and computerized; each has different information)
- World War I & II draft registration cards
- Veteran’s Military Records (NARA: <https://www.archives.gov/veterans/military-service-records>)
- Death Certificate (beware of informant’s possible misinformation)
- Obituary
- Funeral home records, funeral guest books & cards
- Tombstones
- Photographs, personal telephone address books
- Cemetery websites: Find-A-Grave and Billion Graves
- Wills and Probate Files (found in local/county courthouses)

NOTE: Be creative with spellings! Many immigrants did not know how to spell their name. Say the name out loud, then write down any and all phonetic variations. Use “wild cards” in your searches. Discrepancies in names and dates are NOT unusual for our immigrant ancestors.