# Your American Cousins

## What Records Are Made When Someone Comes to America?

Prior to the founding of the United States, most of the 13 colonies had few records of immigration from the British Isles. Some colonies had declarations of allegiance to the colony from non-British citizens.

In 1800, the new federal government established a process for immigration and naturalization. For about 120 years, states and counties maintained the majority of the naturalization records. Few of these records have been microfilmed or digitized.

In 1906, the federal government centralized and controlled naturalization, but people in the process of becoming citizens could still complete it in state and county courts.

## Research Process

The two biggest challenges in current day genealogical research is the plethora of incomplete and inaccurate online family trees, and the lack of completeness of online record sets.

Existing online family trees should be used with caution. Check that images of original records have been linked to individuals and that the typical records available in a time period are all there.

The majority of searchable records available on *FamilySearch* and *Ancestry* are incomplete both for locations and time periods. Digitization of existing microfilm is still ongoing, and much of what is digitized is not indexed for easy searching.

In addition, original records in America always have missing pages, books, and sometimes entire sets.

Family historians in the UK must trace their genealogy downward to find the ancestors who immigrated to America. Start with identifying a travel period of no longer than 5 years if possible. Then use that period to go through passenger arrival lists in the US.

If tracing during the colonial period, use the following records in each colony: land deeds, tax records, court records (hardest to access online).

DNA matches can help locate current day researchers and tie together family trees. Shared match trees may need to be built out which could be incredibly time consuming.

There are currently few publications of American family genealogies. The best location to find these are county and state genealogical societies.

## Federal Immigration & Naturalization

Before 1906, the federal courts were one of many courts who could naturalize immigrants into citizens.

Immigrants who did not start the immigration process prior to 1906, began and ended the processed solely in federal courts. These records are archived in the regional National Archives for that federal court.

No central index exists of all federal naturalization records or passenger lists.

## State Immigration & Naturalization

Each state established their own laws at the time of their founding. Most of these state laws are based in English common law, except Louisiana which is based on French and Spanish law.

Generally people arriving from the British Isles were not recorded when they arrived. They also did not need to naturalize.

There are criminal and civil courts in each state and the names of those courts vary. Naturalization was a civil matter.

*FamilySearch* microfilmed original records in the mid-20th century. Check familysearch.org -> Search -> Catalog -> [state] -> Naturalization and citizenship

## County & City Naturalization

Generally there are criminal courts and civil courts in each county. Naturalization was a civil matter. Large cities had mayoral courts for some parts of our history which also conducted naturalization.

Every county has a courthouse which issues all county records since the county was formed. Some county courthouses have moved records to a local archival facility.

*FamilySearch* microfilmed original courthouse records in the mid-20th century. Check familysearch.org -> Search -> Catalog -> [state, county or city] -> Naturalization and citizenship

Before the internet, county genealogical societies created indexes to their local naturalizations and preserved local family genealogies. To find these groups, go to wiki.familysearch.org

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# American Cousin Research Resources

**U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services**
https://www.uscis.gov/records/genealogy/historical-records-series-available-from-the-genealogy-program

**National Archives (NARA) General Information on Immigration & Naturalization**
https://www.archives.gov/research/immigration
https://www.archives.gov/research/immigration/naturalization

**National Archives (NARA) Regional Archives**
https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/United_States_National_Archives_Regional_Branches

**Passenger Arrival Records**
https://www.archives.gov/research/immigration/passenger-arrival.html

**FamilySearch Wiki to Locate State and County Records**
https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/United_States_Genealogy

**Surname Associations**
https://www.cyndislist.com/surnames/

**Example of Oaths of Allegiance for the Province of Pennsylvania**
https://www.familysearch.org/search/film/007941216

**US Census Immigration & Naturalization Questions:**

| | |
|---|---|
| 1820 | Number of foreigners not naturalized |
| 1830 | The number of White persons who were foreigners not naturalized |
| 1870 | #19 Is the person a male citizen of the United States of 21 years or upwards?<br>#20 Is the person a male citizen of the United States of 21 years or upwards whose right to vote is denied or abridged on grounds other than "rebellion or other crime?" |
| 1900 | #16 What year did the person immigrate to the United States?<br>#17 How many years has the person been in the United States?<br>#18 Is the person naturalized? |
| 1910 | #15 Year of immigration to the United States<br>#16 Is the person naturalized or an alien? |
| 1920 | #13 Year of immigration to the United States<br>#14 Is the person naturalized or alien?<br>#15 If naturalized, what was the year of naturalization? |
| 1930 | #22 Year of immigration into the United States<br>#23 Is the person naturalized or an alien? |
| 1940 | #16 If foreign born, is the person a citizen? |
| 1950 | #14 If foreign born, is the person naturalized? |

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