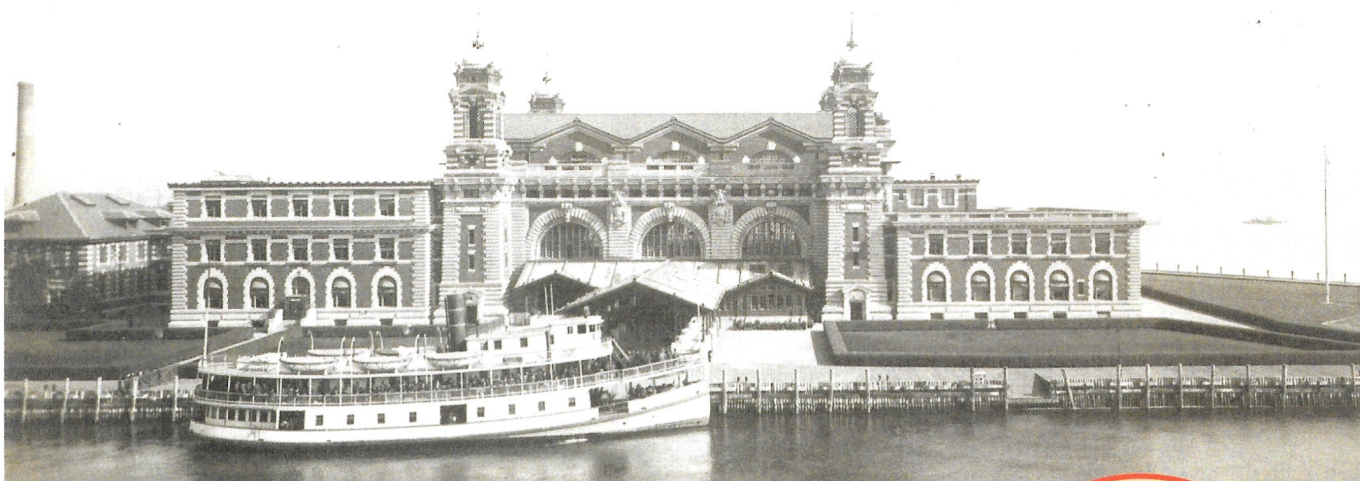


ELLIS ISLAND RESEARCH

COMPILED BY ANDREW KOCH



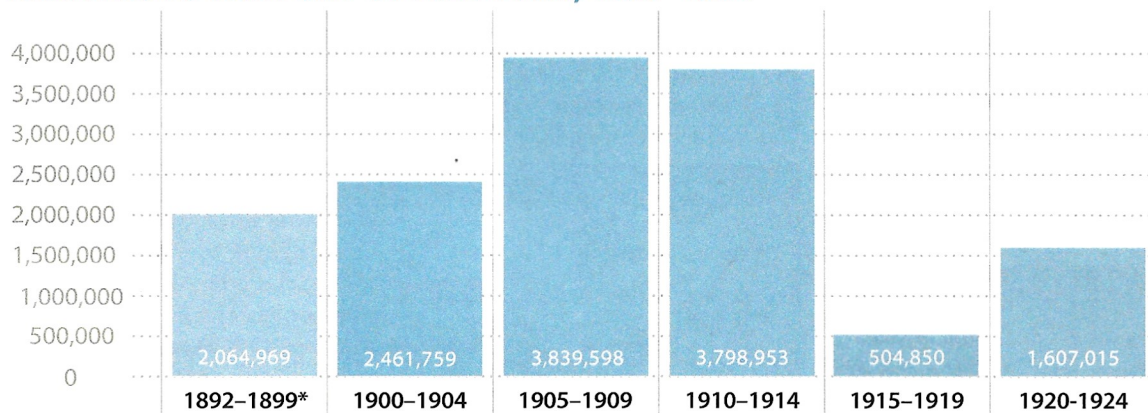
NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

BY THE NUMBERS

- **1892–1954:** years of operation
- **12 million** unique immigrants processed, 71% of all US arrivals between 1892 and 1924
- **11,000** immigrants processed per day at its peak, in 1907
- **40%** of Americans today who trace their ancestry through Ellis Island
- **\$170 million** restoration project, completed in 1990

Famous Ellis Island arrivals include composer Irving Berlin, psychologists Carl Jung and Sigmund Freud, and actor Charlie Chaplin.

ARRIVALS TO THE PORT OF NEW YORK, 1892–1924



*Ellis Island was closed from 15 June 1897 to 16 December 1900. Between those dates, new arrivals in New York were processed in a nearby barge office instead.

Source: *Historic Resource Study* by Harlan D. Unrau (U.S. Department of the Interior, 1984), based on Annual Reports of the Commissioner General of Immigration, 1892–1924 and data from INS

ELLIS ISLAND RECORDS ONLINE

Ellis Island Foundation <heritage.statueofliberty.org/passenger>

Ancestry.com \$ <www.ancestry.com/search/collections/7488>

FamilySearch <www.familysearch.org/search/collection/1368704>

Findmypast \$ <search.findmypast.com/search-world-records/united-states-passenger-and-crew-lists>

MyHeritage \$ <www.myheritage.com/research/collection-10512/ellis-island-other-new-york-passenger-lists-1820-1957>

One-Step Webpages <www.stevemorse.org/ellis2/intro.html>

1 VERIFY FAMILY STORIES.

Because Ellis Island is iconic, many families claim descendance from an arrival there.

But Ellis Island only operated between 1892 and 1954. (See the myths below.) Know, too, that many first- and second-class passengers didn't even set foot on Ellis Island, so your ancestor's experience may have been different than what we generally think of as the typical arrival story.

2 USE "SOUNDALIKE" SEARCHES.

Most databases offer some way of broadening name searches to include alternative spellings, important when looking through handwritten documents that may have been misindexed. Also consider searching by nicknames or (for women) maiden names.

3 CONSULT OTHER RECORDS.

They'll help you locate arrival lists or verify information you find in them. Naturalization records often refer back to the time and place of arrival, and the federal census generally asked about birthplace.

4 WATCH FOR "BIRDS OF PASSAGE."

These immigrants may have arrived through Ellis Island multiple times. It wasn't unusual for one person (usually a man) to arrive in the United States, work for some time, then return to his home country to collect the rest of his family.

5 REVIEW INSTRUCTIONS.

Often imaged with the lists themselves, these will help you better understand what officials were being asked to do and what various entries mean. For example: how officials were to distinguish between Nationality and Race/People.

6 STUDY ELLIS ISLAND'S HISTORY.

Significant events in the station's history (such as its closure due to fire damage from 1897 to 1900 and severe restrictions on immigration in 1921) affected your ancestor's experience. Learn about the island itself; the timeline in this cheat sheet is a great starting point.

Oral Histories



The Statue of Liberty—Ellis Island Foundation also houses the Oral History Project, a collection of some 2,000 firsthand accounts of Ellis Island from passengers and employees <www.statueofliberty.org/discover/stories-and-oral-histories>. Interviewers asked subjects about memories of their home countries, plus their thoughts and experiences before, during and after the voyage. They give invaluable insight into the immigrant experience—even if your ancestor wasn't profiled.

Log in with a free account to listen to interview audio (generally taken in the 1970s through 1990s) or read transcripts. Most interviews can be accessed online, though some are exclusive to the island's in-person museum.

ELLIS ISLAND MYTHS

"My family's name was changed at Ellis Island."

This is an oft-repeated falsehood. Ellis Island officials merely checked immigrants' names against lists created at the port of departure; they did not make any changes themselves. Your ancestor may have opted to change his name *on his own* elsewhere (such as after settling in the New World) to sound more American. Also: Language was likely not an issue during processing, as Ellis Island employed workers who spoke a variety of languages.

"My ancestor arrived at New York, so he must have passed through Ellis Island."

Ellis Island only received passengers from 1892 to 1897 and 1900 to 1954. (After 1924, arrivals were limited to certain cases.) If your ancestor arrived outside of those years, they didn't come through Ellis Island.

"Many people were turned away at the 'Island of Tears.'"

True, some people were denied entry at Ellis Island and deported. However, this represented only an estimated 2% of arrivals, most of them for health or economic reasons.

TIMELINE OF ELLIS ISLAND HISTORY

- 1774** New York merchant Samuel Ellis purchases the island that now bears his name.
- 1808** Ellis Island comes under federal jurisdiction. The US Army and Navy use it variously over the next few decades, dubbing a fort built there “Fort Gibson.”
- 1820** The US government requires documentation of new arrivals; these survive as customs lists.
- 1855** New York State opens an immigration station at Castle Garden. Some eight million immigrants are processed there through 1890.
- 1886** The Statue of Liberty on nearby Bedloe’s Island is dedicated.
- 1891** The US government becomes responsible for regulating immigration, and establishes the Office of Immigration; standardized passenger arrival lists are required.
- 1892** Ellis Island Immigration Station opens. 17-year-old Annie Moore from Ireland is recognized as the first immigrant processed there.
- 1897** A fire destroys the buildings on Ellis Island.
- 1900** Ellis Island reopens, now with fireproof structures.
- 1902** Ellis Island opens a new hospital building; additional expansions (including a ward for those who have contagious diseases) follow over the next few years.



LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

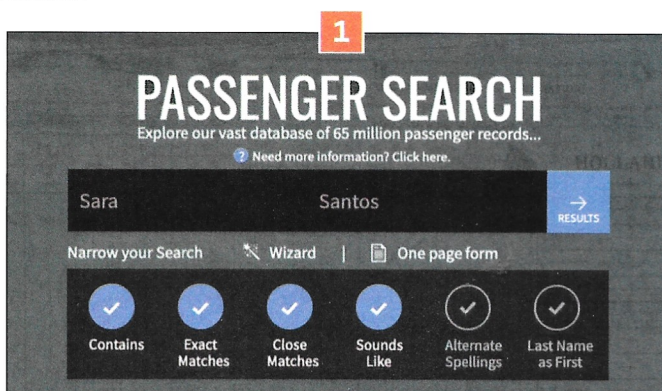
- 1917** Immigration slows during World War I. Ellis Island is used to jail suspected enemies and treat wounded American soldiers.
- 1921** The Emergency Quota Act heavily restricts the number of immigrants allowed from any given country; thousands of immigrants are stranded on Ellis Island as they await deportation.
- 1924** Congress passes even stricter immigration quotas, and administrative changes sideline Ellis Island’s role as a processing center. Only certain categories of immigrants (war refugees, displaced persons, those with inadequate paperwork, etc.) arrive to the island.
- 1939** The U.S. Coast Guard uses Ellis Island as a base during World War II. The island is again used to detain enemies and treat injured Americans.
- 1954** Ellis Island closes, having processed nearly 12 million new arrivals.
- 1959** Architect Frank Lloyd Wright designs a repurposed, mixed-use Ellis Island, but dies before the idea gains traction.
- 1965** Ellis Island is added to the Statue of Liberty National Monument.
- 1976** Ellis Island opens to the public.
- 1982** The Statue of Liberty—Ellis Island Foundation is established.
- 1990** The Ellis Island Immigration Museum opens, alongside the Immigrant Wall of Honor and restored buildings.
- 1998** The Supreme Court rules that most of Ellis Island is technically part of New Jersey, not New York.
- 2001** The American Family Immigration History Center opens.

TUTORIAL: PASSENGER LIST SEARCH

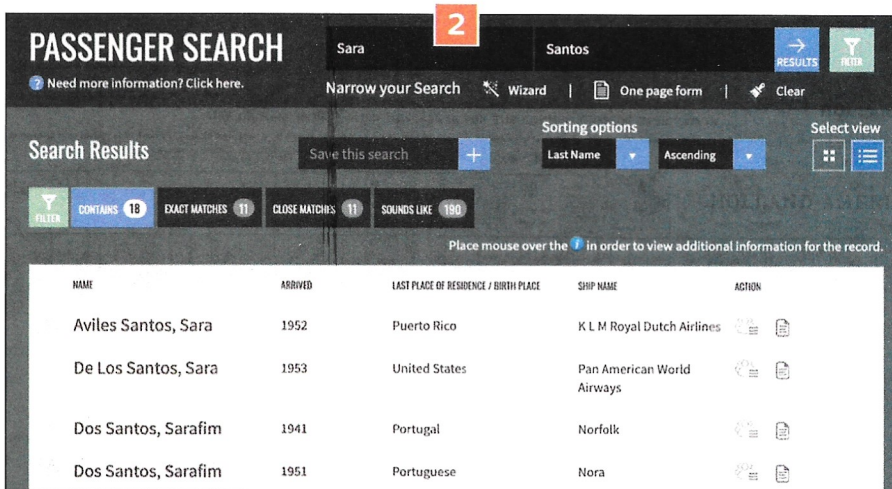
BY SUNNY JANE MORTON

The Statue of Liberty—Ellis Island Foundation has a database of 65 million passenger records from the port of New York City <heritage.statueofliberty.org>. Covering 1820 to 1957, the collection includes all years that Ellis Island was active. Create a free account to get started.

1 From the home page, enter the name of interest in the appropriate fields. Remember that your ancestor's name may be spelled in different ways: Spelling wasn't as standardized in times past as it is today, language differences may have created issues, and the list may not reflect any later "Americanization." You can choose several different filter options by opening the Wizard: year of birth, place of origin, or ship.

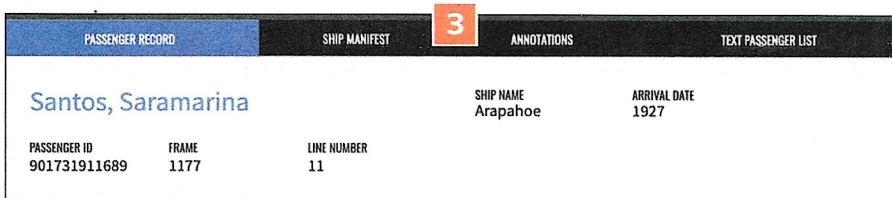


2 Click Results to see matching records, with columns for name, year of arrival, place of residence or birth, and name of ship. (Later records indicate an airline, instead.) The two icons at right take you to a transcription of the passenger record, and an image of the ship manifest itself. If you're lucky, you'll also see a third icon for information on the ship. Roll over the i at left to see a quick summary of each result.



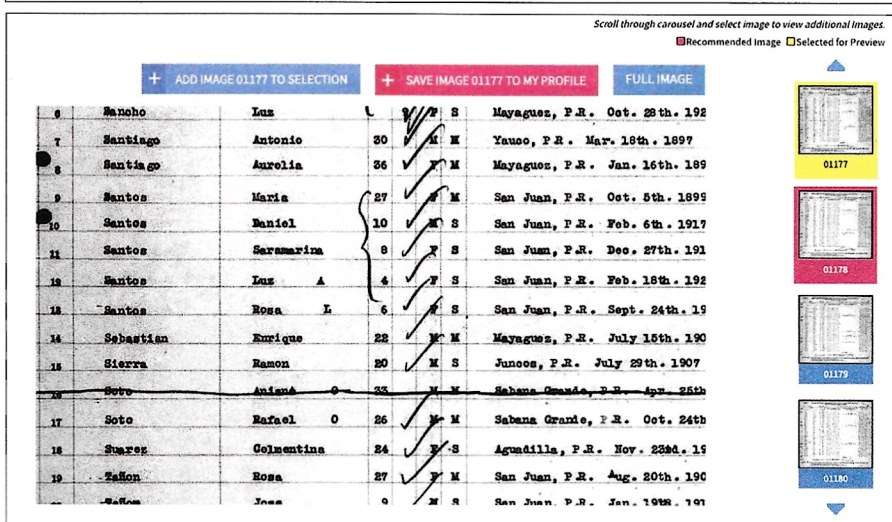
Note you can reopen the Wizard or one-page form from this page, making it easy to filter down results further or change your search parameters. The tabs at top show how your different terms can affect your results.

3 Click the icons to view detailed results. You'll see the Passenger Record transcription (image at right, top) is somewhat sparse—just a passenger name, ship name, and year of arrival. But make sure to note the line number.



The Ship Manifest tab (or icon, from the results page; image at right, bottom) includes more details. Scroll down past the "Two Image Ship Manifest" box (which prompts you to purchase print copies of the images) to find a digital version that you can view for free.

The interface is a little clunky. But you can hover over the line that you got from the Passenger Record (in this case, line 11) to see your ancestor of interest. Beneath the image is a table transcribing information on all the people listed in the record. And the thumbnails highlight other pages associated with the manifest.



Questions Asked

All manifests asked for the arrival's: full name, age in years and months, sex, occupation/"calling," ability to read and write, and final destination in the United States. Below are a list of other questions that were asked over time. Customs lists in Ellis Island's early history (through 1897) included fewer details than later passenger lists.

Find downloadable passenger list templates by year at <www.familytreemagazine.com/free-ancestor-immigration-forms>.

	Customs lists	Passenger lists				
	1883-1897	1897-1903	1903-1907	1907-1913	1913-1917	1917-1942
Marital status		X	X	X	X	X
Nationality		X	X	X	X	X
Last residence		X	X	X	X	X
Destination/seaport		X				
Whether has a ticket		X	X		X	X
By whom passage was paid		X	X		X	X
If the person has \$30/\$50		X	X		X	X
Previous visits to the US		X	X		X	X
Name and address of relative in the US		X	X	X	X	X
Placement in prison or almshouse?		X	X		X	X
Polygamist?		X	X		X	X
Contract laborer?		X	X		X	X
Anarchist?			X		X	X
Condition of physical and mental health		X	X		X	X
Disabilities?		X	X		X	X
Number of luggage pieces	X					
Color/race/people		S	X	X	X	X
Country of birth		S	X		X	X
Mother tongue		S				
Religion		S				
Physical appearance: height, hair and eye color, identifying marks, complexion			X		X	X
Intention to stay, leave or become citizen?						X

S: Asked only on a supplemental form

Sample Passenger List, 1913

Courtesy Ancestry.com

PAGE 1

1

FORM 5000-11
Department of Commerce and Labor
IMMIGRATION SERVICE

LIST OR MANIFEST OF ALIEN PASSENGERS FOR THE UNITED STATES

ALL ALIERS, in whatsoever class they travel, MUST be fully listed and the master or commanding officer of each vessel carrying such passengers

S. S. *Saunouia* sailing from *Tunis* on the *6th* of *September* 1913

No. on List	HEAD TAX EXEMPTIONS	HEAD TAX DEPOSITS	NAME IN FULL		Age	Sex	Married or Single	Calling or Occupation	Able to Read	Able to Write	Nationality (Country of which citizen or subject)	Last Permanent Residence		The name and complete address of nearest relative or friend in country whence alien came.
			Family Name	Given Name								Country	City or Town	
1			<i>Botos</i>	<i>Erster</i>	<i>19</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>single</i>	<i>in hour with year</i>	<i>yes</i>	<i>yes</i>	<i>Hungary</i>	<i>Hungary</i>	<i>Finncentai</i>	<i>father: Denis Szogy, Finncentai</i>
2			<i>Blar</i>	<i>Javika</i>	<i>40</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>single</i>				<i>Croatian</i>	<i>Bakar</i>	<i>Kobrov at all</i>	
3			<i>Papa</i>	<i>Java</i>	<i>39</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>single</i>							
4				<i>Josefine</i>	<i>11/2</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>single</i>							
5				<i>Hera</i>	<i>9</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>single</i>							
6			<i>Vilut</i>	<i>Hana</i>	<i>16</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>single</i>				<i>German</i>	<i>Germany</i>	<i>father: Vilut Josef, Germany</i>	
			<i>if: Ruda</i>	<i>Gerlo</i>	<i>48</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>single</i>	<i>wood</i>	<i>yes</i>	<i>yes</i>	<i>Rumanian</i>	<i>Boedimeter</i>	<i>father: Vilut Josef, Germany</i>	

2

PAGE 2

STATES IMMIGRATION OFFICER AT PORT OF ARRIVAL

must upon arrival deliver lists thereof to the immigration officer. This (white) sheet is for the listing of STEERAGE PASSENGERS ONLY.

Arriving at Port of *New York* on the *27th* of *September* 1913

No on List	Final Destination (State and City or Town)	Whether carrying a ticket	By whom passage paid	Whether ever before in the United States and if so, when and where?	Whether going to join a relative or friend, and if so, what relative or friend, and his name and complete address?	Whether a Polygamist	Whether an Anarchist	Condition of Health, Mental and Physical	Deformed or Crippled, Nature, length of time, and cause	SUPPLEMENTAL INFORMATION REQUIRED BY NATURALIZATION ACT APPROVED JUNE 29, 1906.			
										Height	Color of Complexion	Mark of Identification	Place of Birth
1	<i>Wich Detroit</i>	<i>yes</i>	<i>self</i>	<i>no</i>	<i>husband: Botos Erster, 280 1/2 44th St, Detroit, Mich. no money good no</i>					<i>5 2</i>	<i>dark brown grey</i>	<i>nil</i>	<i>Hungary, Finncentai</i>
2	<i>W. V. Rosebud</i>	<i>yes</i>	<i>husband</i>	<i>no</i>	<i>husband: Rosebud, 101st St, Rosebud, W. Va.</i>					<i>5 7</i>	<i>black black</i>		<i>Germany</i>
3			<i>husband</i>	<i>no</i>	<i>husband: Rosebud, 101st St, Rosebud, W. Va.</i>					<i>5 3</i>	<i>black</i>		<i>Rosytka</i>
4			<i>father</i>	<i>no</i>	<i>father: Rosebud, 101st St, Rosebud, W. Va.</i>								
5				<i>no</i>									
6	<i>Wich Winton</i>	<i>yes</i>	<i>uncle</i>	<i>no</i>	<i>uncle: Jeger Jains, 946 46th St, Winton, Mich.</i>					<i>5 4</i>	<i>dark fair grey</i>		<i>Germany</i>
7	<i>Wich Aurora</i>	<i>yes</i>	<i>son</i>	<i>no</i>	<i>son: 381 Jefferson Ave, Aurora, Ill.</i>					<i>5 5</i>	<i>gray brown</i>		<i>Boedimeter</i>
8	<i>Wich Rosier</i>	<i>yes</i>	<i>husband</i>	<i>no</i>	<i>husband: Herse, 101st St, Rosier, Mich.</i>								<i>Nijerbas</i>

1 Multiple pages: From 1907 to 1947, manifests were two pages' long. (In other years, they are just one page.) Note that page 2 won't have a column for name—you'll need to follow the row from page 1. Also: In digitized collections, page 2 may appear before page 1, and may not be indexed. Page forward and back when viewing digital images to ensure you see both.

2 Stamps and letters in the leftmost column provide additional information about the person's arrival and possible detention. "Admitted," "Discharged" or "In Hospital" refer to a stay at the island's medical facility. "In Transit" and "Non Immigrant Alien" signify the person was not intending to remain in the United States. "X" indicates a person was held for one further inspection—look for references to them in pages titled "Record of Aliens Held for Special Inquiry."

3 Numbers written above an Occupation entry indicate the immigrant's arrival record was verified by officials, generally during the naturalization process. The numbers have specific meaning; here, 6-57195 6/2/37 indicates the immigrant filed for naturalization in district 6 (Pittsburgh) on 2 June 1937, application number 57195.

4 Quotation marks ("") in a cell indicate "same as above."

CASTLE GARDEN, 1855–1890



NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

If your “Ellis Island” ancestor arrived in New York City between 1855 and 1890, they were actually processed at Castle Garden. Originally built in 1811 as Fort Clinton, Castle Garden was the nation’s first immigration station. The site has also functioned as an entertainment venue and once housed an aquarium, but today is open to the public and managed by the National Park Service.

Like Ellis Island records, immigration records from the Castle Garden era are available through the State of Liberty—Ellis Island Foundation’s website. Because Castle Garden pre-dated standardized passenger arrival lists, you’ll be looking for ship manifests (which contained fewer details).

Signs the date *14 December 1871*
 Before me *W. C. ...*
 List of Manifest Of ALL THE PASSENGERS taken on board the *S. G. T. S. Rhein*
 is Master, from *Bremen* burthen

NAMES	Age		SEX	OCCUPATION	The country to which they severally belong.	The country in which they intend become inhabitants.
	Years	Months				
<i>1 J. E. Reynolds</i>	<i>22</i>	<i>✓</i>	<i>m</i>		<i>Baltimore</i>	<i>U. S. of A.</i>
<i>2 Harry ...</i>	<i>61</i>	<i>✓</i>	<i>m</i>	<i>student</i>	<i>New York</i>	<i>U. S. of A.</i>
<i>3 Julia</i>	<i>50</i>	<i>✓</i>	<i>f</i>			
<i>4 Hermann</i>	<i>21</i>	<i>✓</i>	<i>m</i>			
<i>5 ...</i>	<i>17</i>	<i>✓</i>	<i>f</i>			
<i>6 Harry</i>	<i>14</i>	<i>✓</i>	<i>m</i>			
<i>7 Charles</i>	<i>12</i>	<i>✓</i>	<i>m</i>			
<i>8 ...</i>	<i>8</i>	<i>✓</i>	<i>f</i>			

Ship manifest from New York City, 1871. Courtesy Ancestry.com

OTHER U.S. PORTS OF ARRIVAL

In Ellis Island’s heyday between 1900 and 1924, roughly 70% of the 17 million immigrants to the United States came through New York. But the Big Apple wasn’t the only prominent port of entry during that time. Dozens of cities around the United States received immigrants from foreign countries. Here are just some of the busiest ports, along with estimates for the number of accepted immigrants:

- Boston: 900,000
- Baltimore: 582,000
- San Francisco: 155,000
- Seattle: 82,000
- New Orleans: 58,000

The National Archives maintains a list of microfilmed and/or digitized passenger record collections for US ports, organized by state <www.archives.gov/research/immigration/ports>.



Angel Island, San Francisco



Boston Harbor

BOTH IMAGES: LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

Visiting Ellis Island



VALÉRY ANATOLIEVICH/PEXELS

Today, Ellis Island is a popular destination for both historians and the general public. Hop on a ferry from Manhattan's Battery Park or New Jersey's Liberty State Park to visit. Attractions include the National Museum of Immigration (which has self-guided audio tours that document immigrant experiences and Ellis Island history), the Family History Center, and the American Immigrant Wall of Honor. If you're leaving from New York, you'll pass Castle Clinton National Monument, where Ellis Island's predecessor once operated.

Tickets are available through Statue City Cruises <www.cityexperiences.com/new-york/city-cruises/statue>. The \$25 fee includes transportation and access to museums on both Ellis Island and Liberty Island (home of the Statue of Liberty). For \$75, you can add a "hard hat" tour of Ellis Island's immigrant hospital complex.

RESOURCES

Articles

"A Guide to Interpreting Passenger List Annotations" by Marian L. Smith, et al. <www.jewishgen.org/inf/files/manifests>

"Ellis Island Records: Search Guide to EllisIsland.org and More" by Rick Crume <www.familytreemagazine.com/records/immigration/ellis-island-records-search>

"Genealogy Q&A: Ellis Island and Castle Garden" by the editors of *Family Tree Magazine* <www.familytreemagazine.com/records/immigration/genealogy-qa-ellis-island-castle-garden>

"Passenger Search Tips & Tricks" by the American Family Immigration History Center <www.statueofliberty.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Tips-Tricks-Guide.pdf>

"Understanding Your Ancestor's Experience at Ellis Island" by David A. Fryxell <www.familytreemagazine.com/records/immigration/coming-to-america>

Books & Publications

American Passage: The History of Ellis Island by Vincent J. Cannato (Harper Perennial)

Coming to America: A History of Immigration and Ethnicity in American Life, second edition by Roger Daniels (Harper Perennial)

Ellis Island: Images of America by Barry Moreno (Arcadia Publishing)

Ellis Island Interviews: Immigrants Tell Their Stories in Their Own Words by Peter Morton Coan (Fall River Press)

Ellis Island: A People's History by Małgorzata Szejnert (Scribe US)

The Family Tree Guide to Finding Your Ellis Island Ancestors by Sharon Carmack (Family Tree Books)

Forgotten Ellis Island: The Extraordinary Story of America's Immigrant Hospital by Lorie Conway (self-published)

Immigration Records Genealogy Cheat Sheet compiled by Diane Haddad <store.familytreemagazine.com/immigration-records-genealogy-cheat-sheet>

Ships of Our Ancestors by Michael J. Anuta (Genealogical Publishing Company)

They Came in Ships: A Guide to Finding Your Immigrant Ancestor's Arrival Record by John P. Colletta, Ph.D. (Ancestry)

Websites

Family Tree Magazine: Immigration and Naturalization Records for Genealogy <www.familytreemagazine.com/immigration-naturalization-records>

FamilySearch Wiki: New York Emigration and Immigration <www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/New_York_Emigration_and_Immigration>

Save Ellis Island <www.saveellisland.org>

The Statue of Liberty—Ellis Island Foundation <www.statueofliberty.org/ellis-island>