



Locating your Immigrant's Hometown

Debbie Gurtler, AG®

FamilySearch
DSGurtler@FamilySearch.org

Struggling to trace your ancestor to their homeland? Learn about a myriad of United States (U.S.) sources that may contain that treasured piece of information - the name of your ancestor's hometown. Learn record types you might find when you get there and how to find help once you get there. At the end of this presentation you will know what information is needed to get your ancestor across the pond; what U.S. record types could supply that information; what kinds of records and resources you might expect to search once you've crossed the pond; and where to find help when you need it.

INFORMATION NEEDED TO "CROSS THE POND"

Before you can begin to search for you ancestor in international records you need to know the following:

1. Name of the ancestor.
2. Name of his hometown, not just a county, state, province, or country.
3. Approximate date for an event - Birth or marriage.
4. Family connection or a way to positively confirm you have found your ancestor in international records.

U.S. RECORD TYPES WITH PLACE OF ORIGIN INFORMATION

There are many U.S. record types that might give an ancestor's exact place of birth. The following list includes the most common. There may be others.

Records found in the home

- Journals
- Photographs
- Letters
- Family Bible

Vital Records

- Marriage certificates
- Death certificates

Social Security Application

- <https://secure.ssa.gov/apps9/eFOIA-FEWeb/internet/main.jsp>
- Parents' names not needed
- Get the original application

Church records

Obituaries

Local histories with biographical information

Ethnic Newspapers

Draft registration records

- All males age 18 and up
- Citizenship didn't matter
- Old man's draft in 1942

Societies, unions, groups

Border crossing records

- Find the manifest or the long form
- There may be multiple crossings

Citizenship or naturalization papers

- Later ones are better
- Declaration of intent

Passenger lists

- More recent ones are better
- Who is traveling with the ancestor?

COMMONLY USED INTERNATIONAL RECORDS AND RESOURCES

There are some record types common to many international countries. This list is not all-inclusive but rather are those most commonly used. Record types and availability varies greatly by country. Most international countries do not have nationwide censuses or indexes.

Church records

Whether they were Catholic, Lutheran or some other religion, church records in many countries are the backbone of family history research. You must know the name of the town or parish before you can begin. They include the following types of records:

- Christenings/baptisms
- Marriages
- Burials
- Confirmations

Civil Registration

These are government created records of births, marriages and deaths. They tend to be more recent. You must know the name of the municipality or city before you can locate them. Civil registration laws established these records in most countries in the 19th century.

Gazetteers

Sometimes the spelling of a town in U.S. records is not correct in the ancestral language. Using a gazetteer can help you to locate places. Gazetteers can help you:

- Locate parishes and municipalities
- Identify nearby locations for radial searches
- Learn about boundary or jurisdictional changes

Departure records

Some international countries have records of individuals and families leaving the country. These are not extant. Here are just a few examples:

- Hamburg passenger lists
- Emibas for Swedish immigrants
- Immigrant Ancestors Project

FINDING HELP WHEN YOU NEED IT

There are many resources available to help you learn about International research and records. These are just a few.

FamilySearch Research Wiki

A free, online genealogy and family history guide that lists websites, provides research strategies, and suggests records and resources to help you find ancestors from all over the world. In the wiki you can search by country AND record type to learn more about:

- Time periods of available records
- Record content
- Common record translations
- Where to find records
- Other online resources

Translation helps

Can't speak or read a foreign language? Don't despair! There are many aids to help you understand the records. Here are just a few places to find translation help.

- Google Translate
- Script.byu.edu
- Indexing resources
- Community.FamilySearch.org

Google Translate

Use when you can clearly read the written words but can't translate the information. Enter the foreign words in the box on the left side of the screen and receive the English translation in the box on the right side of the screen. You can let Google automatically detect the language or you can specify the language from the drop-down menu.

Script.BYU.edu

Contains online tutorials, alphabet charts, sample documents, and much, much more.

Community.FamilySearch.org

New online platform where you can get help from people around the world. The community is a place to:

- Ask questions about FamilySearch products
- Find research assistance
- Post documents you need help translating
- Share your expertise by answering questions

Ask a question is for finding help and asking about FamilySearch products. Groups is the place to locate a research group for different areas and languages around the world. You can search by country name or language or just scroll through the list.

Tips and strategies

- Find every record of your ancestor in the U.S.
- Sometimes it takes a combination of documents
- Full family research
- FAN [Friends Associates Neighbors] Club approach
- Radial search in international records