

## Researching Passenger Lists for American Ancestors

Finding your immigrant ancestor in passenger lists can be exciting. The information you can find within passenger lists can vary from year to year. You will also want to search immigration/emigration and passport records.

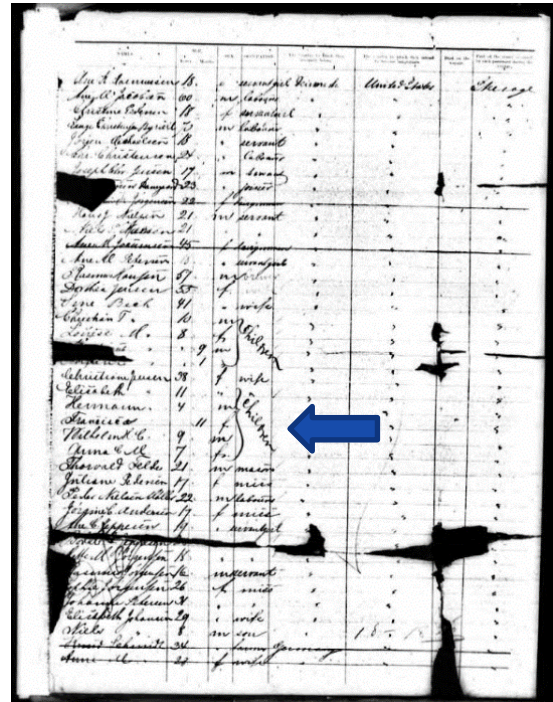
Traveling by ship was a dangerous journey. Therefore, often family or community groups traveled together.

The trick to verifying your ancestor in passenger lists is a combination of logical time and place, but also with whom they traveled. Keep an eye out for other family and surnames on passengers on either side (up and down) of your target ancestor when reviewing passenger lists. Be sure to review pages before and after your ancestor as well. Other family may be on those other pages.

Keep in mind that immigrants may have traveled by land or by sea. For example, an immigrant may have sailed to Canada and then crossed into the United States by land. Keep an open mind, not everyone came through Ellis Island.

Steamships shortened the travel time from European countries to the U.S. from about six weeks to about two weeks beginning in the late 1800's. This helped to reduce the dangers of ship travel and provided a way for families to travel back and forth. You may find your ancestors on several passenger lists as they returned to their homeland and back again.

Side Note: Once you discover where and when your ancestor immigrated, research the history of where they came from to discover why they emigrated. Was it a lack of food, work, or future land opportunities? There was a reason they were pushed out of their homeland or pulled into their new country. Learning this will help you understand and write the story of your family history.



Francisca Jensen arrival in New York, U.S. on 3 July 1882 aboard the ship "Geiser" from Denmark. She is traveling with her mother Christiane Jensen and her siblings.<sup>1</sup>



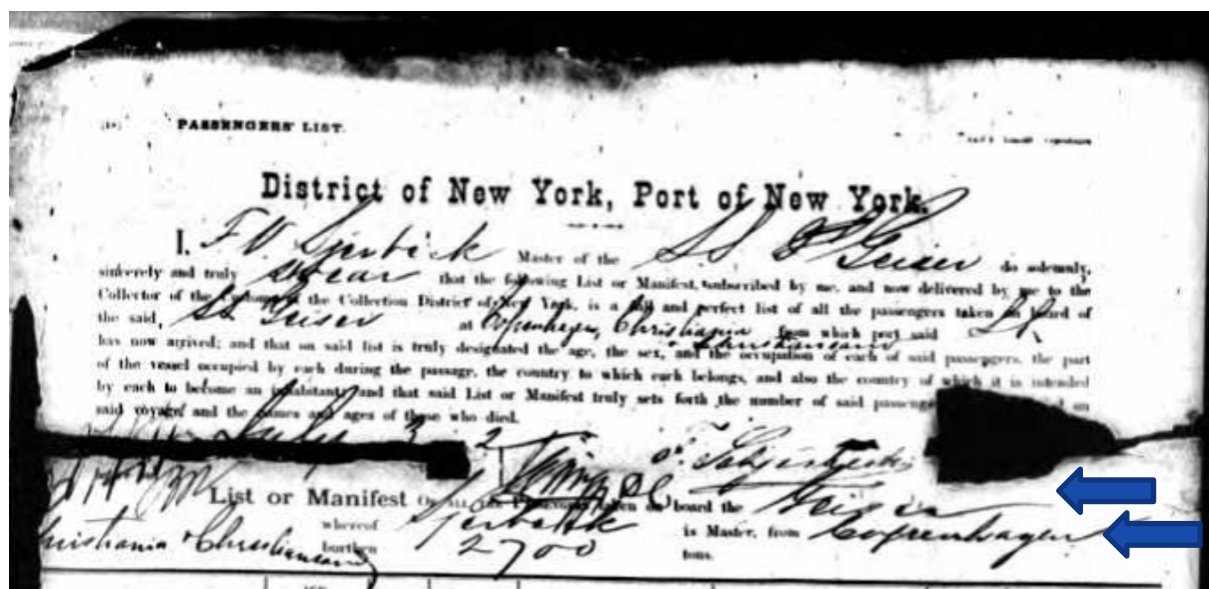
## Definitions:

- Immigrant or Immigration = A person arriving.
- Emigration or Emigrant = A person leaving.

Knowing the difference between Immigration and Emigration is key to understanding the records of your ancestors as they are arriving or departing a place.

Search both the U.S. immigration records and passenger lists, as well as records in the country from which your ancestor came. There might be emigration records there too.

Once you find your ancestor in a passenger list, be sure to go backward to the first page of the list to get the front matter information about the ship, where it came from, number of passengers, etc.



Front matter of a Passenger List provides more information.  
The arrows point out this ship's name was the "Geiser" and its origination was Copenhagen. <sup>1</sup>

## What you will need to know to begin your research:

- Ancestors Full Original Name (but try various spellings)
- Estimated Age During Travel
- Approximate Date of Arrival or Departure
- What Country They Emigrated From

Tip: Knowing what other family members they may have traveled with, will help correctly identify your ancestor.

<sup>1</sup> Ancestry.com New York, U.S. Arriving Passenger and Crew Lists (including Castle Garden and Ellis Island), 1820-1957, database with images (<https://www.ancestry.com> : accessed 5 January 2021), "Ship Manifest for Geiser," front matter, image 1; citing Microfilm publication M237, 675 rolls, list number 911.

## Timeline

- 1492-1763 (Colonial Era) Passengers list were created by the Captains for their own benefit and vary.
- 1565 Earliest ships with the founding of Saint Augustine, FL.
- 1565 – 1954 Immigrants to U.S. by Ship
- Before 1820 Passenger lists are few and are in various locations.
- 1820 U.S. Law mandated Passenger Lists.
- After 1820 Passenger Lists were microfilmed and widely available online. (See list of sources below).
- 1830 – 1892 Castle Garden was America’s first immigration center.
- 1862 – The Homestead Act encouraged immigration.
- By 1880 Steamships for human transport became popular.
- 1892 – 1954 Ellis Island processed immigrants.
- 1954 Ellis Island Closes

What you can find in passenger lists:

- Name of Ship
- Captain
- Port and Date of Departure
- Port and Date of Arrival
- Roster of Passengers
- Personal information about passengers such as age and gender
- Other information varies

## Sources for Passenger List:

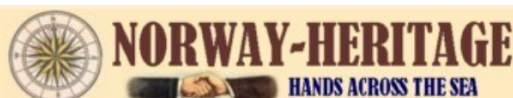
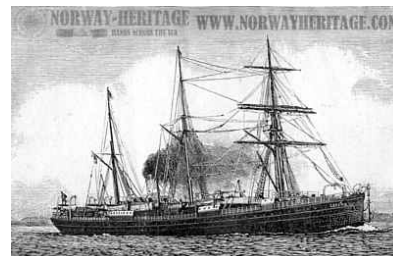
- Ancestry - [Ancestry.com](https://www.ancestry.com) (subscription, free at libraries and National Archive locations)
  - Search Tab, drop down to Immigration and Travel
  - Search by name, estimated birthdate, and approximate arrival (use Exact to +/- to create a range of years).
  - See the Featured Data Collections on the Right Side of the Immigration and Travel search screen (pictured here).
- FamilySearch [FamilySearch.org/search](https://www.familysearch.org/search) (free)
  - Scroll down to “Restrict records by:” select “Immigration and Naturalization.”
  - Search the name, birthplace, and birthdate range.
  - Then go to the Collections tab and look for Passenger Lists.
- The Statue of Liberty—Ellis Island Foundation – (free) for immigrants arriving in New York, NY. <https://www.statueofliberty.org/discover/passenger-ship-search/>
- National Archives at New York City (free)
  - <https://www.archives.gov/nyc/finding-aids/passenger-lists.html>

### Featured data collections

New York, U.S., Arriving Passenger and Crew Lists (including Castle Garden and Ellis Island), 1820-1957  
 U.S., Border Crossings from Canada to U.S., 1895-1960  
 U.S., Passport Applications, 1795-1925  
 UK and Ireland, Incoming Passenger Lists, 1878-1960  
 New South Wales, Australia, Unassisted Immigrant Passenger Lists, 1826-1922  
 Hamburg Passenger Lists, 1850-1934  
 U.S., Naturalization Records, 1840-1957

[View all in Card Catalog](#)

- National Archives (free) – Access to Archival Databases (AAD) has immigrations from Russia (1834-1897), Irish Famine (1846-1851), Germans 1850-1897), Italians (1855-1900) <https://aad.archives.gov/aad/series-list.jsp?cat=GP44>
- Pennsylvania State Archives holds Passenger Lists from 1727-1808 for immigrants arriving in Philadelphia on microfilm. More info here. <https://www.phmc.pa.gov/Archives/Research-Online/Pages/Naturalization-Immigration.aspx>
- Ship Images at Ancestry (subscription) [https://www.ancestry.com/search/categories/img\\_ship\\_port\\_pictures/](https://www.ancestry.com/search/categories/img_ship_port_pictures/)
- Norway-Heritage <http://www.norwayheritage.com/>
  - Passenger Lists for Norwegian emigrants 1825-1873
  - Ship Images



### S/S Geiser, Thingvalla Line



[Main Page >>](#)

Burden	Built		Shipowner or operator		Dimensions
2,831 gross	1881 at Copenhagen by <a href="#">Burmeister &amp; Wain</a>		<a href="#">Thingvalla Line</a>		324.4ft x 39.3ft x 22ft
Year	Departure		Arrival		Remarks
1881					August, launched
1882					Jan. 4, delivered
1882					Jan. 1, departed from Copenhagen on her maiden voyage to New York via Christiansand
1882					<b>Christiania - Christiansand - New York</b>
1882	Christiania	Mar. 08	New York	Mar. 28	Capt. Thomsen from Copenhagen to New York via Christiania and Christiansand. 138 emigrants embarked in Christiania. Reported westerly hurricanes in the Atlantic Ocean
1882	Christiania	Apr. 27	New York	May 14	Capt. Schierbeck from Christiania with 257 emigrants and cargo of 5,000kg wood pulp
1882	Christiania	June 15	New York	July 01	Capt. Schjerbeck arrived in Christiania from Copenhagen with some 400 Danish and Swedish emigrants. Another 242 emigrants embarked in Christiania and loaded 10 barrels of medicine fish oil, and 20,000kg wood pulp. Stopped for two hours

Arrow points to same voyage as shown in the passenger list from page 1. Additional information is given to help tell the ancestors story.

### Resources:

- [FamilySearch.org/wiki](https://www.familysearch.org/wiki)
  - Search "Passenger Lists" for various places to look for passenger list.
- [Passenger Search](https://heritage.statueofliberty.org/passenger) <https://heritage.statueofliberty.org/passenger>
- [Ship Search](https://heritage.statueofliberty.org/ship) <https://heritage.statueofliberty.org/ship>
- [Genealogy Primer](https://www.statueofliberty.org/discover/genealogy-primer/) <https://www.statueofliberty.org/discover/genealogy-primer/>
- [Ellis Island Stories and Oral Histories](http://www.statueofliberty.org/discover/stories-and-oral-histories/) <http://www.statueofliberty.org/discover/stories-and-oral-histories/>
- [Ellis Island Educational Resources](https://www.statueofliberty.org/ellis-island/education/) <https://www.statueofliberty.org/ellis-island/education/>

-  BOOK "In the Shadow of Liberty: The Chronicle of Ellis Island by Edward Corsi  
<https://amzn.to/2XkTvMU> (affiliate)
-  BOOK "They Came in Ships" 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition 2002 by John P. Colletta, Ph.D.  
<https://amzn.to/2Mqz7HI> (affiliate)

LINK TO THE VIDEO FOR THIS HANDOUT <https://youtu.be/Wqk08S7SajU>