



World Library and Information Congress: 70th IFLA General Conference and Council

22-27 August 2004
Buenos Aires, Argentina

Programme: <http://www.ifla.org/IV/ifla70/prog04.htm>

Code Number: 117-E
Meeting: 84. Genealogy and Local History
Simultaneous Interpretation: -

EUROPEAN EMIGRATION RECORDS, 1820-1925

George R. Ryskamp, J.D., AG
Associate Professor of History
Brigham Young University

Abstract:

Immigration records are wonderful, but often fail to give a complete picture of the emigrants and the experiences and processes they went through. European emigration records provide extensive information about individual emigrants, often including the place of origin. No survey of all such records exists and there is not even a complete list of records types and locations for any single European country. In describing the work of the Immigrant Ancestors Project at Brigham Young University this paper identifies the various record types that were generated by emigrants in the process of emigration, giving examples from several countries where each type of record may be found.

Text:

In one of the greatest migrations the world has seen, approximately fifty-five million Europeans emigrated between 1820 and 1925. The vast majority went to the Americas—33 million to the United States, 5.4 million to Argentina, 4.5 million to Canada, 3.8 million to Brazil and the rest in smaller, but significant numbers to countries from Chile to Mexico—melding with indigenous and previous immigrants to enrich and forever change the recipient countries and their cultures. While Ireland, Germany, Italy and England top the list in terms of numbers departing, every country in Europe contributed

to the flow. These statistics and associated studies are only a black and white sketch of the rich tapestry of individual emigrant experiences that make up this great migration.

For social historians and genealogists, the individual experience of each emigrant holds more importance than the statistics. Each has a unique story, like that of Manuel Roso. In 1839, Spanish Immigrant Pedro Roso was becoming commercially successful in his adopted homeland of Puerto Rico. Earning money in Puerto Rico was so much easier than in his native village of Puerto de Santa Maria in southern Spain that he sent a letter to his father requesting his younger brother, Manuel, join him. On 17 August 1839, Manuel Roso was issued a passport by the municipal authorities to travel the short distance to Cádiz. There he applied for and was granted another passport that allowed him to continue his journey to meet his older brother, Pedro, in Puerto Rico. The passport allowing him to make the first section of his journey is now found in the Provincial Historical Archives of Cádiz.

In addition to that original passport, Manuel Roso's file contains other documents giving even more information about him and his brother Pedro. In a letter of permission to a local civil authority in Puerto de Santa Maria written by the Rosos' father, also named Pedro Roso, the elder Roso identifies himself as a baker residing in Puerto de Santa Maria. He states that he regrets having to part with his younger son, but explains that it is in the boy's best interest and asks that the passport be issued to allow his son to join his older brother. The passport file also includes a copy of seventeen-year-old Manuel Roso's baptismal record, giving his exact birth date and place as well as naming his parents and their marriage place.¹

Numerous stories like that of Manuel Roso can be found throughout Europe during the nineteenth century. Under a wide variety of circumstances—rich, poor, convict, free, single, married, seeking economic opportunity or fleeing political or religious oppression—emigrants left homes and often families to go to the New World. Countless records exist to tell those emigration stories, not only collectively, but individually. This paper will look at the types of these records and how and where to find them, focusing on those that name specific persons and give details about their particular emigration experiences. Especially valuable for the genealogists are records giving the particular place of origin of the emigrant, as that allows for the tracing of ancestral lines.

ARRIVAL RECORDS

The records best known for telling the emigration story are passenger lists prepared at the time of the arrival of the ship in the destination country. Perhaps most famous are those of Ellis Island although many others exist, not only for other ports and times in the United States but for other countries and ports, such as those at the Hotel de Immigrantes

¹ Archivo Histórico Provincial de Cadiz, *Gobierno Civil, Pasaportes*.

in Buenos Aires. The best of these offer extensive detail about each immigrant, including the key place of birth. Many are accessible in published accounts² and Internet sites.³

Even the best passenger lists tell only part of the individual immigrant's story, and most do not even do that. Over half of those in the United States do not give key details such as place of birth, and few give story details such as reasons for emigrating. In Latin America, even when arrival records are preserved, the information given is still less. For example, in passenger lists for the years 1891-1930 for the port of Buenos Aires, Argentina, the place of birth for the immigrant is only given during a four-year period. For these reasons, the researcher would want to consult European emigration records, as they hold the potential value of giving a more complete understanding of the emigration process and its individual stories.

DEPARTURE RECORDS

The Immigrant Ancestors Project, sponsored by the Center for Family History and Genealogy at Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah, is working to identify records produced in Europe that document the emigration experience and provide the place of birth of the emigrant.⁴ Records have been located in municipal, provincial, state and national government archives, as well as in university and private archives in Germany, Spain, Italy, France, Portugal and the United Kingdom. This research has revealed a mosaic of laws, regulations and practical applications that produced a wide variety of records documenting the experience of individual emigrants as they worked through requirements imposed on them before they could leave their countries of birth.

Passenger Lists

Just as passengers were recorded in most ports as they disembarked, so they were often listed as they sailed from the ports of Europe. Lists were maintained in all five of the largest mass emigration ports: Hamburg, Bremen, Liverpool, Le Havre and Naples. Sadly, only those of Hamburg have survived the ravages of war and bureaucratic archival cleansing. These have been microfilmed and indexed.

Existing passenger lists have been found for smaller ports, such as Lisbon and Porto in Portugal; Llanes, Spain; Bordeaux and La Rochelle in France; and even, for scattered years before mass migration, in Naples. The information in these records varies from nothing more than the emigrant's name, age and port of destination to more detailed descriptions of passengers including their places of birth. At this time, practically none of these have been indexed. Many have only recently been identified and have not yet been

² Passenger and Immigration Lists Index: A Guide to Published Records of More Than 2,923,000 Immigrants Who Came to the New World Between the Sixteenth and the Mid-Twentieth Centuries (Detroit: Gale Group, 1998.); John Philip Colletta, *They Came in Ships* (Baltimore, Genealogical Publishing Co., 1997).

³ See for example: www.ellisland.org, www.stevemorse.org, www.ancestry.com, <http://home.stt.net/~weemonster/ei.html>, www.immigrantships.net, www.olivetreegenealogy.com/ships/search_ships.shtml .

⁴ See immigrants.byu.edu and familyhistory.byu.edu .

the subject of academic study. Finding others that may exist will require visits to municipal and provincial archives in port cities in each European country.

Other Port of Departure Records

Often, one of the greatest challenges confronting genealogists is to locate the birthplace of an immigrant ancestor. Of the 55 million Europeans who emigrated between 1820 and 1920, only about fourteen percent can be found in passenger lists, either arrival or departure, that tell their birthplace. Practically none of the 17 million who went to Latin America appear on such records. The best place to go to find the unknown birthplaces of immigrants is emigration records in the home country

Passenger lists were only one form, albeit the most common, to control passenger departures. Other types of records found at the port of departure included:

- a) Passports. Often prepared on printed forms or in register books, these show that the emigrant received a passport, often identifying the specific ship of departure. The forms include the emigrant's name, destination, profession, birthplace, age, and physical description. These collections often precede or are merged into the passports issued by provincial authorities, as described below. Passport books found in Genoa, Italy are of this type. [See Figure 1](#), Page from a Passport Register. Santander, Cantabria, Spain
- b) Passengers in transit. In many cases ships stopped to pick up passengers at intermediate ports before sailing for the Americas. Ship captains may have been required to file a list of such passengers, as was the case in Porto, Portugal and Naples, Italy by the mid 1880s.
- c) Health records. In some ports the only requirement, or one significant requirement, was a health check performed by a port physician or provided by the shipping company. These checks may have resulted in a single page certificate of good health, stating the passenger was free from diseases such as tuberculosis or glaucoma, the same as were checked by United States port authorities before admitting immigrants.
- d) Passenger contracts. One unique record so far located only in Spain is a contract between the ship's captain or owners, and the passengers. Beginning in 1853, a royal order stipulated that each of these contracts had to lay out the quality of transportation to be provided, including exact quantity and quality of food and water rations, as well as the destination of the ship and what the payment terms were for each passenger. These had to be written before a notary and approved by the *subgobernador*. Unfortunately they did not have to be placed in the notary's register, although many were. The company was required to keep a copy, as was the local provincial government, and a third copy was sent with the ship to be filed upon arrival. While scattered examples are found in notarial registers in port cities, in most cases the companies kept these in their own archives. The

Transatlantic Company, by far the largest providing passenger service, kept its contracts filed in its central archive in Madrid. Much of that archive, including all of the contracts, was “lost” during a transfer of company headquarters in the 1970s.

Approval to emigrate before departure

For paternalistic reasons and/or for control of population movement, governments enacted procedures to regulate emigration. At some time, requirements existing in most, if not all, countries included: 1) that the emigrant have completed military responsibilities; 2) that he or she was not wanted for criminal offences or trying to flee any authority; 3) that he or she was not trying to abandon family; and 4) that he or she, if under age, had permission from their father or other family authority. The gathering of this documentation was handled by the port authorities, the local provincial governments or by a provincial level police authority such as the *Questura* in Italy or the *Prefecture* in France.

The key difference from the passports required for movement internally in most countries as well as those issued at the port for population movement control was the preparation of documentation proving the emigrant met the requirements discussed above. To accomplish this, a file was created for each emigrant or emigrant family with types of documentation such as follows:

1. *Certificate of Personal Identification* Similar to our identification cards today, these included a physical description of the emigrant, address of residence, birthplace, age and other identifying information.
2. *Parent/Spouse Authorization* Each emigrant may have been required to show authorization from his/her spouse if married, and from his/her parent if single and under age of majority, usually 25 or 30 years.
3. *Baptismal record or Certification of Freedom to Emigrate* A baptismal record might have been required if the emigrant was under a certain age, and those over that age could simply have an authorized statement of eligibility to emigrate.
4. *Criminal Record* In most cases the emigrant needed a document certified by a judge, police or civil authority of his home or last residence district, certifying he had no criminal record.
5. *Certificate of Completion of Military Service* A male was required to have a statement by a judge, police or civil authority of his home district stating he had met his military obligation, either by service or by having stood for the draft and not been taken.

Often these passport records come in two parts, the first, a register book of all passports issued (or applied for), and the second, a collection of individual files, one for each applicant or applicant family, containing the documentation discussed above. [See Figure 2](#). Pages from an Italian Passport Application file. Naples, Italy. Without doubt the researcher should try to go to the file and not stop at the register book, even when it gives

the place of birth. The file will contain the most interesting material about the emigrant, often including statements as to reasons for emigrating. Records of this type have thus far been found in Germany, Spain and Italy, but were likely required at least at some time period in all continental European countries.

Published Announcements

At certain time periods, the way in which municipal authorities were able to or required to ascertain that the proposed emigrant was qualified to emigrate was to publish a notice of the intended emigration in the official provincial government bulletin. In Spain and Italy, where some of these have been found, the bulletins were issued weekly or more frequently. Again, the time period during which this procedure was used is limited and their use not fully studied. [See Figure 3](#). Published notice of intent to emigrate, Oviedo, Asturias, Spain.

BRITISH AND IRISH PRE-DEPARTURE RECORDS

The British Isles took a different stance toward emigration from that of the rest of Europe. Aside from passenger lists, other forms of emigration control used on the continent do not appear among British records. Rather than attempting to prevent the departure of those with criminal records or who were in debt, the authorities in these countries encouraged emigration as a way of dealing with the poor. Vestry minutes and estate records exist that identify those whose passage was paid as a means of meeting local obligations imposed by the poor laws. Transportation to colonies appears regularly in quarter sessions records as a sentence for criminal activity. A variety of records exist relating to indentured servitude and other similar ways of acquiring passage. For these reasons the search for emigration records in the British Isles offers a series of challenges and potential solutions not found in the rest of Europe

AFTER ARRIVAL RECORDS

Consular Records

All European countries maintained consulates working to meet the needs and often to protect the interests of their citizens. Many of these consulates kept records of transactions taken by their citizens residing in the destination countries. Most commonly these appear to record requests for passports, identification proofs, registration of births, or assistance with an inheritance or other legal problem in the country of origin. On occasion the consul appears to go beyond this to an effort to identify all emigrants. In either case these records identify emigrants and provide more of the story of the emigration process.

Home Town Censuses and Emigrant Lists

Even after their emigration, the emigrants were still considered residents of their home towns. As such they are often listed in local censuses, with an annotation as to where they

are living and the date of emigration. Some municipalities also kept register books of those who had emigrated. Little has been done to identify these types of records and less to extract the information that they contain.

Military Absence Records

Both youth of the age for military service and local authorities responsible for the draft recognized that emigration was a means of avoiding military service. Although little study has been done of illegal emigration during this period, the largest group of illegal emigrants was most likely young men of conscription age. In Italy, provincial conscription lists often identify missing youth as having emigrated. In Spain, lists of those who did not report for draft registration were published in the provincial bulletins discussed above, indicating either the countries where the men were thought to have gone or that they were thought to be in a port city such as Cadiz, apparently a euphemism for the fact they had emigrated or were likely trying to do so.

FINDING EMIGRATION RECORDS

Passenger arrival lists in the United States have been available on microfilm for decades. Numerous published sources have provided indexes to specific ports for specific time periods or specific ethnicities. During the last three years, beginning with the Ellis Island web site, online indexes to these records have been available. Recent developments on sites such as www.stevemorse.org and www.ancestry.com have further opened the possibilities for searching arrival passenger lists and other immigrant sources in the United States. Work on Canadian immigration records has recently begun, but is limited so far primarily to the early years of the twentieth century. Little has been done to index arrival lists in Latin America, although the work done by the Centro de Estudios Migratorios Latinoamericanos [Avenida Independencia 20, (1099) Buenos Aires, Argentina] which has indexed arrivals at the port of Buenos Aires, Argentina 1882-1926, offers hope that such records will be more readily available in the future. At this time, however, even a comprehensive list of where such arrival records can be found would be most helpful, especially where many Latin American immigrants arrived in one country but ultimately settled in another.

Finding European emigration records can be more challenging. Except for the Hamburg passenger departure lists, available on microfilm with indexes currently being placed on line,⁵ no other major collection of departure lists exist and only a handful of those for smaller ports are currently being indexed. To find the wide variety of records discussed above one must turn to the original records still to be found in archives in the home country. At this point the arrival passenger lists and other information gathered in the destination country can aid in the search for the emigrant. Such records, even if they do not give the place of birth can narrowly focus the research as to the date of emigration and the port of departure. This information will assist greatly in focusing the search, thus narrowing the volume of material that must be searched in a European archive.

⁵ The Hamburg Passenger Lists, 1850–1934 Resource Guide at www.familysearch.org.

The vast majority of the European emigration records described above can be found in provincial level archives in Europe. Obviously, in order to search those one must know the province or *departement* from which the emigrant came, or the port from which he sailed. With that information, perhaps from arrival passenger lists, there must then be a search through the bundles for those years. This task can generally only be done on site although in some instances, such as in certain German provinces, records are available on microfilm through the LDS Family History Centers. Lists identifying the provincial level archives can be found for each country, often with website addresses. In some cases, such as in Baden and Hanover in Germany, efforts are underway to create indexes on the Internet for these collections.

Some emigration records are found at the national archives level, such as a collection of consular records at the Archivo General de la Administración in Alcalá de Henares, Spain, and passenger lists at the Arquivo Nacional Torre do Tombo in Lisbon. At http://www.unesco.org/webworld/portal_archives/pages/Archives/ can be found lists of all national archives and many provincial and local archives in Europe. There are also web sites created by those archives, often containing inventories of collections, etc.⁶

As indicated above, many good emigration records are also found at the municipal level. Unless indexed, these offer little assistance until the home town in the country of origin is known. Clearly at that point they help to tell the emigration story, but offer no value as a locator tool. So far, efforts to index European emigration records are limited to only a handful of localized projects.

ILLEGAL OR EXTRALEGAL EMIGRATION

Recognition must be made that in addition to the problems with locating records and significant missing or destroyed emigration records, there were those who went without meeting legal requirements or registering on the passenger lists. The number of draft age youths identified as having emigrated is indicative of this problem. Likewise, in port authority or police records there are discussions of actions such as unscheduled ship inspections taken to identify illegal emigrants who are on board. Another manifestation of this problem would be ship crew members who deserted upon arrival in the Americas. With so much to be done to identify and index records of legal emigration, little has been done to address this problem or even ascertain how large a percentage crossed over illegally.

IMMIGRANTS ANCESTORS PROJECT AT BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY

This discussion has touched briefly on emigration records such as passport files, passenger contracts, vestry minutes and consular records—all rich in genealogical

⁶ Access to many archives throughout Europe can be made through the site mentioned above or through individual national archival sites such as the following: http://aer.mcu.es/sgae/index_aer.jsp, www.iannt.pt, <http://www.archivesnationales.culture.gouv.fr/>, <http://www.bundesarchiv.de/>, <http://www.archivesdefrance.culture.gouv.fr/>, <http://www.pro.gov.uk/>.

information but largely untouched simply because they are not easily available. Few are microfilmed. Most are accessible only by visiting the archives containing the records, and are rarely indexed or sorted.

The Immigrants Ancestors Project at Brigham Young University (IAP) has set the goal of looking for these hard- to-find emigration records in European home countries with the following objectives:

1. Identify emigration records
2. Acquire copies of those records
3. Extract data on individuals who appear in those records
4. Place extracted data in an online index/database available free on the Internet.

Work is progressing well on the first two goals. In addition to German emigration files which have been microfilmed, passport records from Cadiz and Santander in Spain for the middle years of the nineteenth century have been identified, copied and partially extracted. Major collections from Spanish consular offices all over the world have been identified and arrangements for copying are being made. Emigration records from municipal archives in Galicia and Asturias have been copied and await extraction. This spring student interns worked with great success finding and copying more of these in several archives in the British Isles and the Spanish Basque provinces, as well as in Rome and Naples in Italy, and Lisbon and Porto in Portugal.⁷ In all cases copies of emigration record collections identified have been or are being acquired.

The copies are then digitalized and arranged in small batches. Extraction by volunteers is the key to success for the Project. Utilizing specifically created software, volunteers all over the world, working via Internet, are sent small batches of emigration records to extract. The extracted data is then sent back to the Center for Family History and Genealogy, where trained student supervisors check extractions for accuracy before they are added to the database. The data from those small extracted batches will be continually added to create the online database that will eventually include millions of immigrants with their places of origin. The initial database with thousands of names is found at <http://immigrants.byu.edu>. Also found there are lists of archives, research tools and an extensive bibliography of books and articles about immigrants and the immigration experience.

⁷ The following are some of the archives in Spain, Italy and Portugal where students from the Center for Family History and Genealogy at Brigham Young University worked in the Spring of 2004 gathering records for the Immigrant Ancestors Project: Archivo General de la Administración – Alcalá de Henares, Archivo Nacional de Cataluña, Archivo del Reino de Galicia, Archivo General de la Administración del Principado de Asturias, Archivo Histórico Provincial de Asturias, Archivo Histórico Provincial de Cáceres, Archivo Histórico Provincial de Cádiz, Archivo Histórico Provincial de Cantabria, Archivo Histórico Provincial de Toledo, Archivo Histórico Provincial de Vizcaya, Archivo Histórico Municipal de Llanes, Archivo de Protocolos de Guipúzcoa, Archivo Foral de Vizcaya, Archivo de la Diputación Provincial de Cáceres, Archivo de la Diputación Provincial de Barcelona, Archivo Histórico de la Biblioteca de Cantabria, Hemeroteca Municipal de Santander, Archivo del Minutero degle Afari Esseri d'Italia, Roma, Archivio di Stato di Napoli, Instituto Nacional Torre de Tombo, Lisboa and Arquivo Distrital de Oporto.

At present the project focuses on emigrants from Germany, Spain, Ireland, England, Scotland, Wales, Italy, Portugal and France, but plans are to add other countries as resources permit. The IAP needs large numbers of volunteers to extract records. Volunteers, who will receive online training in reading the records and research resources to help in the extraction process, may sign up on line at <http://immigrants.byu.edu>.

Even with generous support of time and effort from volunteer extractors and of office space, personnel and faculty time from BYU, a project of this magnitude needs donated funds. Donations made to the IAP pay wages for student researchers, provide copies of identified records, and support computer program development and maintenance.

CONCLUSION

European emigration records hold the stories of passage for millions of emigrants. Many of these records also give a specific place of emigrant origin. While we know these registers exist, except for the Hamburg passenger lists and a few German provincial records, up to now they have neither been microfilmed nor indexed. The Center for Family History and Genealogy at Brigham Young University has begun the process of identifying and indexing those records in Germany, Italy, France, Spain, Portugal and the British Isles. We look forward with great anticipation to the coming months and years as, throughout the world, professional genealogists, students and volunteers—each of us, in a sense, the recipient of emigrant efforts—join together to make these records available and appreciated.