

Canadian border immigration records, 1895–1950s

Part 1: The records

Did your ancestor immigrate to the United States by crossing the U.S.-Canada border? The U.S. government began keeping records of alien arrivals at the Canadian border in 1895. Part 1 of this article will introduce the U.S. records that document U.S.-Canada land border crossings. In a future issue, part 2 of this article will examine the interesting process by which those records were created and work through some case studies.

Pre-1895 arrivals

Researchers can document the date—or approximate date—of pre-1895 alien arrivals by using a variety of records. Federal census records for 1900, 1910, 1920, and 1930 ask each foreign-born person's year of immigration to the U.S. An immigrant's presence or absence in earlier censuses can help approximate the decade in which he arrived. Post-1906 naturalization records should include the date and port of arrival, and pre-1906 often do so.

Newspaper obituaries might mention the immigrant's year of arrival. If he lived in a city after arrival in America, his sudden appearance in the annual city directory could be a clue that he arrived in the U.S. a year or two before. Use clues from these and other records to narrow down that pre-1895



arrival.

The researcher seeking a pre-1895 immigration record should *also* check the 1895 and later immigration records described below. Aliens often departed from the U.S. and returned at a later date. An alien's post-1895 arrival manifest may therefore tell you the date and port of his previous arrival(s).

1895–1950s

Understanding Canadian border immigration records first requires learning about the governmental administrative structure and process that created them. The filing scheme matters. Where was the record created, where was that record filed, and why?

Records of alien arrivals at the U.S.-Canada border were created and collected by the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) and its predecessors, the Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization (1906–33) and the Superintendent of Immigration (1891–1906).

From 1895 to June 1917, alien arrivals along the entire U.S.-Canada border were recorded in duplicate on the familiar “ship passenger manifests.” One

copy was kept at the INS office at the alien's port of entry and one copy was forwarded to the INS District Office in Montreal, Quebec, Canada. The Montreal office was later moved to Saint Albans, Vermont. The copies sent to the INS District Office are included in NARA Microfilm Publication M1464, *Manifests of Passengers Arriving in the St. Albans, Vermont, District, through Canadian Pacific and Atlantic Ports, 1895–1954*.

The filing scheme became more complicated on July 1917, and changed again in July 1927 and July 1929. (In those days the federal fiscal year began on 1 July, so that is the reason for the July beginning dates. The federal fiscal year now begins on 1 October.)

Eastern U.S.

From July 1917 to June 1929, alien arrivals at land ports of entry in Maine westward to upstate New York (along the St. Lawrence River) were recorded in duplicate on the traditional “ship passenger manifest.” One copy was kept at the port of entry and the other was sent to the INS District Office at Montreal and will be found in M1464.

Canadian border crossings microfilm publication chart

As of June 2007

Record Group 85, Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service

Number Title and Comments

- M1461 Soundex Index to Canadian Border Entries Through the St. Albans, Vermont, District, 1895-1924. 399 rolls. Comment: There was no "St. Albans" District during these years. It is an index to all entries at Canadian seaports and through the Montreal District, which included the entire U.S.-Canada border through June 1917 and the entire U.S.-Canada border except Montana, Idaho, and Washington through June 1927.
- M1462 Alphabetical Index to Canadian Border Entries Through Small Ports in Vermont, 1895-1924. 6 rolls. The ports of entry are Alburg, Beecher Falls, Canaan, Highgate Springs, Island Pond, Norton, Richford, St. Albans, and Swanton.
- M1463 Soundex Index to Entries into the St. Albans, Vermont, District Through Canadian Pacific and Atlantic Ports, 1924-1952. 98 rolls.
- M1464 Manifests of Passengers Arriving in the St. Albans, Vermont, District, through Canadian Pacific and Atlantic Ports, 1895-1954. 639 rolls. In addition to seaport arrivals, this index should include land border entries from Maine to North Dakota for 1924-27, land border entries from Maine to New York for 1927-29, and land border entries in

From July 1917 to June 1927, alien arrivals at land ports of entry in upstate New York (along the Great Lakes) westward through North Dakota were recorded in duplicate on the traditional "ship passenger manifest." One copy was kept at the port of entry and the other was sent to the INS District Office at Montreal and will be found in M1464. From July 1927 to June 1929 alien arrivals at these ports were recorded in duplicate on card manifests. One copy was kept at the port of entry and the other was sent to the appropriate INS District Office at Buffalo, Detroit, or Chicago. Available microfilm publications are listed in the Canadian border crossings microfilm publication chart that accompanies this article.

From July 1929 to 1954, alien arrivals at land ports of entry in Maine westward through North Dakota were recorded on card manifests and kept at the port of entry.

Available microfilm publications are listed in the Canadian Border Crossings Microfilm Publication Chart.

Far Western U.S.

From July 1917 to June 1927, alien arrivals at land ports of entry in Montana, Idaho, and Washington were recorded in duplicate on the traditional "ship passenger manifest." One copy was kept at the port of entry and the other was sent to the INS District Office at Seattle.

From July 1927 to 1954 alien arrivals at these ports were recorded on card manifests and kept at the port of entry. Available microfilm publications are listed in the Canadian Border Crossings Microfilm Publication Chart.

Who is in the records?

From 1895 to late 1906, the records *only* include non-Canadians entering the U.S. from Canada, either permanent or in transit. "In transit" means that the person was temporarily entering the U.S. for business or pleasure and would depart the U.S. at a different port. From late 1906 to the 1950s, the records include *both* non-Canadian and Canadian citizens. A "Canadian citizen" could be someone who was born in Canada or someone who became a Canadian citizen through the naturalization process. Some U.S. citizens are also found in the records. Typically these

The image shows a handwritten manifest card for Paul Lyman Roberts. The card is titled "MANIFEST" and is dated "Sep. 11, 1932" at "Sweet Grass, Montana". The name "ROBERTS" is written in the "Family name" field, and "Paul Lyman" is in the "Given name" field. The card contains various fields for personal information, including date of birth (1/16/1885), place of birth (Marion County, Mich.), occupation (Rancher), and last permanent residence (Bancroft, Sask.). It also lists friends (Dave Whitten) and a passport number (965-00). The card is stamped with "U.S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR, Immigration and Naturalization Service" and "Form 500-6".

Front of Paul Lyman Roberts card.

persons had either been absent from the U.S. for a long period of time or who were leaving the U.S. permanently.

Let's take a look at a few interesting records to see what we

can find. Let's start with National Archives Microfilm Publication A3440, *Manifests of Alien Arrivals at Sweet Grass, Montana, August 1917-June 1954*, roll 15. Here is Paul Lyman Roberts on an INS Form 548 card manifest that tells us he was born 16 January 1885 at Monroe County, Michigan, and had lived in the U.S. from his birth until 1910. He was a Canadian citizen, a rancher, living in Bengough, Saskatchewan. He had been in the U.S. several times since 1910, the last time being in November 1939. This manifest was dated 11 December 1939. He planned to visit the U.S. for six months. His destination was his son, Clair Roberts, 16005 Bassit [sic] Street, Van Nyes [sic],

California. He was bringing \$965 with him. Perhaps because he had such a large sum of money on him, the immigration inspector noted the amount of land (1/2 section) and money in the bank (more than \$19,000) back home as evidence of this man's temporary arrival.

Now let's turn to National Archives Microfilm Publication A3441, *Manifests of Alien Arrivals at Port Huron, Michigan, February 1902-December 1954*, Roll 27. Here is Rebecca Dennison on INS Form 657 *Record of Registry*. She originally entered the U.S. at Port

Huron, Michigan on 5 December 1919, when she was 24 years, 10 months old. In 1919, she had lived in Hamilton, Ontario. A record of her arrival should have been made in 1919, but the INS could not find one, so this *Record of Registry* was created on 28 April 1931 as an after-the-fact record of her 1919 arrival. In 1931, she was 36 years, 5 months old, and lived at 915 Fourth Street, Peoria, Illinois. Her physical description (eye color, hair color, and height) is given along with

Front of Rebecca Dennison's card.

her photograph. She was born in Zitomir, Wolinsky, Russia.

Julia Evangeline Denomme is also found in A3441, Roll 27, on INS Form I-189, *Application for Resident Alien's Border Crossing Identification Card*. Bad typing makes her surname nearly illegible

Back of Julia Evangeline Denomme's card.

- A3386 Vermont only for 1929-54. Manifests of Alien and Citizen Arrivals at Babb, Montana, June 1928-October 1956. 3 rolls. More than 16,000 manifests.
- A3400 Manifests of Alien Arrivals at International Falls, Baudette, Duluth, Mineral Center, Pigeon River, Pine Creek, Roseau, and Warroad, Minnesota, January 1907-December 1952. 2 rolls. More than 15,000 manifests.
- A3401 Manifests of Alien Arrivals at Eastport, Fort Kent, Lubec, and Madawaska, Maine, ca. 1906-December 1952. 2 rolls.
- A3402 Manifests of Alien Arrivals at Newport, Vermont, ca. 1906-June 1924. 8 rolls. More than 60,000 manifests.
- A3403 Manifests of Alien and Selected U.S. Citizen Arrivals at Anacortes, Danville, Ferry, Laurier, Lynden, Marcus, Metaline Falls, Northport, Oroville, Port Angeles, and Sumas, Washington, May 1917-November 1956. 14 rolls. More than 75,000 manifests.
- A3416 Manifests of Alien Arrivals at Portal, North Dakota, 1915-1921. 4 rolls. More than 13,000 manifests.
- A3428 Manifests of Alien Arrivals at Bangor and Houlton, Maine, ca. 1906-1953. 3 rolls. More than 20,000 manifests.
- A3429 Manifests of Alien Arrivals at Algonac, Marine City, Roberts Landing, Saint Clair, and Sault Sainte Marie, Michigan, 1903-1955. 8 rolls. More than 59,000 manifests.
- A3434 Indexes and Manifests of Alien Arrivals at Anchorage, Juneau, Skagway, and Tok Junction, Alaska, ca. 1910-ca. 1956. More than

- A3440 2,200 records. Manifests of Alien Arrivals at Sweet Grass, Montana, August 1917-June 1954. 18 rolls. More than 106,000 manifests.
- A3441 Manifests of Alien Arrivals at Port Huron, Michigan, February 1902-December 1954. 41 rolls. More than 225,000 alien arrivals.
- A3445 Land Border Entries and Passenger Lists of Vessels Arriving at Vancouver and Victoria, British Columbia, Canada, January 1894-February 1905. 7 rolls.
- A3447 Manifests of Alien Arrivals at Chief Mountain, Cut Bank, Del Bonita, Gateway, Great Falls, and Roosville, Montana, 1923-1956, and of Alien Departures from Great Falls, Montana, 1944-1945. 5 rolls. More than 17,000 manifests.
- A3448 Manifests of Alien Arrivals at Havre, Loring, Opheim, Raymond, Turner, Westby, and White Tail, Montana, 1924-1956. 10 rolls. More than 50,000 manifests.
- M1365 Certificates of Head Tax Paid by Aliens Arriving at Seattle from Foreign Contiguous Territory, 1917-1924. 10 rolls.
- M1478 Card Manifests (Alphabetical) of Individuals Entering Through the Port of Detroit, Michigan, 1906-1954. 117 rolls.
- M1480 Manifests of Alien Arrivals at Buffalo, Lewiston, Niagara Falls, and Rochester, New York, 1902-1954. 165 rolls. More than 1,000,000 manifests. These records were described in Claire Prechtel-Klusken, "One Million More 1902-1954 Immigration Records are Now Available!" NGS NewsMagazine 29 (March/April 2003): 58-59.
- M1481 Alphabetical Card Mani-

at the top of the card, but her signature on the reverse side is clear, and her name is clear on a 1941 manifest that follows as the very next card on the microfilm. From the I-189, we learn that she resides at 29416 Legion Street, Roseville, Michigan. She was born 11 December 1909 at

Front and back of Benjamin Bosworth Haight's card.

Zurich, Ontario. She had entered the U.S. on 16 June 1929 by ferry boat under the name Julia Evangeline Ducharme. Her physical description is given. She applied for the border crossing card on 19 December 1951. Being an alien, she had registered with the INS as required by law, and her alien registration number is noted on the card.

Benjamin Bosworth Haight is found in A3441, Roll 12. He was recorded on 7 November 1916 on INS Form Spl. 187, *Primary Inspection Memorandum*. He's another example of a U.S.-born Canadian citizen returning "home." This record shows that he was age 75, married, and a Canadian citizen of Welsh descent. He was born in Macedon, New York, and had lived in the U.S. from 1841 (birth year) until 1852. Benjamin's sister, Venilla Schooley, remained in Canada, but he was going to Clifford, Michigan, where his brother Samuel E. Haight lived.

These four examples may not be typical but they certainly illustrate the potential that exists in these records for finding useful information about your family.

Types of card manifests created

The traditional ship passenger list form made sense for recording passengers arriving on a steamship, but a huge list was unwieldy when recording individuals or families coming by foot, train, or car. Individual card manifests were easier to handle, and could be alphabetically arranged to make it easier to locate an individual's arrival record at some later date for official purposes, such as verification of entry for naturalization applications. Naturally, different forms were used for different purposes. Some of the most common forms are described below.

INS Form 548, 548-B, or I-448, *Manifest or Report of Inspection*, generally includes the person's name, age, gender, marital status, place of birth, physical description, occupation, citizenship (nationality), race, ability to read and write and in what language, place of last permanent residence, port and date of arrival, destination, purpose for entering the U.S., intention of becoming a U.S. citizen or of returning to country of previous residence, head tax status, and previous citizenships. It also includes the name and address of the friend or relative whom the alien intended to join, persons accompanying the alien, and the name and address of the alien's nearest relative or friend in the country from which he or she came. If the alien had ever been in the U.S. in the past, the dates and places of such residence or visitation are indicated. Additional information may be recorded if the alien appealed a decision deporting or barring him or her from entering the United States. Form 548-B was used for INS records indexing projects by employees of the Works Progress Administration (WPA) during the 1930s.

INS Form 521, a pre-entry examination form, includes the person's name, gender, age, place of birth, country of citizenship, home address, and the names of any accompanying children under age 16. For aliens, the person's occupation, destination in the U.S., the name of the person to whom he was destined, and the intended length of stay in the U.S. were also recorded. The reverse side of the card states, in part, that "This form is intended to facilitate the entry into the United States of returning United States citizens, aliens lawfully resident in the United States returning from a temporary visit to Canada, and aliens coming from Canada for a temporary visit. It should be filled out, signed, and presented to a United States immigration officer at Halifax, Yarmouth, St. John (New Brunswick), Quebec, Montreal, Winnipeg, Vancouver, Victory, or Sidney (British Columbia)."

INS Form 657, *Record of Registry*, includes the following information about the alien *as of the alien's date of arrival*: name; age; occupation; race or people; place of last residence before entry; and date, port, place, and means (ship, railway, or other) of arrival in the U.S. This form also includes the following information about the alien *as of the alien's date of registry*: name, age, occupation, physical description, place of residence, and place of birth. It also includes the alien's photograph, date of approval of registry, certificate of registry number, district file number, and bureau (registry) file number.

INS Form 694, *Record of Alien Admitted as Visitor*, includes the person's name, home address, date and place of birth, gender, marital status, occupation, citizenship (nationality), race, color of hair and eyes, height, names and ages of accompanying children under age sixteen, home address and nearest relative there, destination, length of time admitted, signature, and date and place of admission to the U.S. The reverse side indicates the date and port of departure.

INS Form I-94, I-94B, I-94(C), I-94(E), I-94F, or 257D, *Record of Alien Admitted for Temporary Stay*, includes the alien's name, date and place of birth, gender, marital status, occupation, citizenship (nationality), physical description, names of accompanying alien children under age 14,

	festivals of Alien Arrivals at Alexandria Bay, Cape Vincent, Champlain, Clayton, Fort Covington, Mooers, Rouses Point, Thousand Island Bridge, and Trout River, New York, July 1929-April 1956. 3 rolls. More than 22,000 manifests.
M1482	Soundex Card Manifests of Alien and Citizen Arrivals at Hogansburg, Malone, Morristown, Nyando, Ogdensburg, Rooseveltown, and Waddington, New York, July 1929-April 1956. 3 rolls. More than 19,000 manifests.
M2016	Alphabetical Index of Alien Arrivals at Eagle, Hyder, Ketchikan, Nome, and Skagway, Alaska, June 1906-August 1946. 1 roll.
M2017	Lists of Aliens Arriving at Skagway (White Pass), Alaska, October 1906-November 1934. 1 roll.
M2018	Lists of Aliens Arriving at Eagle, Alaska, December 1910-October 1938. 1 roll.
M2042	Alphabetical Manifest Cards of Alien Arrivals at Calais, Maine, ca. 1906-1952. 5 rolls. More than 37,500 manifests.
M2046	Alphabetical Manifest Cards of Alien Arrivals at Jackman, Maine, ca. 1909-1953. 3 rolls. More than 17,600 manifests.
M2064	Alphabetical Manifest Cards of Alien and Citizen Arrivals at Fort Fairfield, Maine, ca. 1909-April 1953. 1 roll.
M2065	Alphabetical Manifest Cards of Alien Arrivals at Van Buren, Maine, ca. 1906-1952. 1 roll. More than 6,300 manifests.
M2071	Alphabetical Manifest Cards of Alien Arrivals at Vanceboro, Maine, ca. 1906-December 24, 1952. 13 rolls.

name and address of nearest relative at home, name and address of person to whom destined, purpose and intended length of U.S. visit, port and date of arrival, and means of transportation. The purpose of the U.S. visit may be described in English (such as “pleasure 1 month”) or as “B-2 72 hours” or “P1/3/2/3/8 days”)

INS Form Spl. 187, or Spl. 187A, *Primary Inspection Memorandum*, includes person’s name, gender, age, marital status, occupation, ability to read and write and in what language, head tax status, citizenship, race, place of last permanent residence, destination, citizenship before becoming a citizen of Canada, port and date of arrival, destination, purpose for entering U.S., intention of becoming a U.S. citizen, head tax status, and previous citizenships. It also includes the name and address of the friend or relative whom the alien intended to join, persons accompanying the alien, and the name and address of the alien’s nearest relative or friend in the country from which he or she came. If the alien had ever been in the U.S. in the past, the dates and places of such residence or visitation are indicated. Additional information may be recorded on the reverse side of the card if the alien appealed a decision barring him or her from entering the U.S.

Form I-189, *Application for Resident Alien’s Border Crossing Identification Card*, includes the person’s name, permanent U.S. address, date and place of birth, gender, marital status, occupation, ability to read and write, citizenship (nationality), physical description, and the date, place, and means of lawful entry into the U.S. for permanent residence. It also includes the alien’s signature and/or fingerprint, and the border crossing identification card number and its date of issuance.

Form I-407, *Land Border Departure Record*, records an alien’s abandonment of lawful domicile in the U.S. The form includes the person’s name, age, gender, race, marital status, occupation, ability to read and write, country of citizenship, country of residence before coming to the U.S., place of last permanent residence in the U.S., place intended as permanent residence (U.S. or foreign city), and alien registration number. It also includes the port, date, and means (auto, railroad, or other) of departure;

the date and port of last (most recent) arrival in the U.S.; and place, date, and certificate number of naturalization. For aliens, certain “facts of last recorded admission for permanent residence” were to be noted, including the person’s name and the port, date, and means (auto, railroad, or other) of arrival. Other arrival dates and places or visa numbers may also be noted.

The INS microfilmed the original paper records in the 1950s and then destroyed them as a space-saving measure. Microfilming standards in the 1950s were not as stringent as those followed today, and the image quality can vary considerably from record to record, and roll to roll. Also, some manifests were lightly handwritten or typewritten, and those records reproduce more poorly than those recorded in darker ink.

Locating and searching the records

Finding a record of a relative’s Canadian border crossing is becoming easier. More records are available as NARA microfilm publications at the National Archives Building, Washington, D.C., and at selected NARA Regional Archives. (Find research facilities having NARA microfilm in NARA’s microfilm catalog at Order Online <<http://www.archives.gov/research/order/orderonline.html>>. You do not need to register or buy anything.)

Some commercial genealogy companies are making these NARA microfilm publications accessible from any desktop via online access. Unfortunately, however, the online image quality is sometimes poorer than the image quality of the microfilm available

for public use at the National Archives. Unfortunately, also, the explanatory information accompanying the online images often fails to note from which specific NARA microfilm publication and roll the image came from,

which makes it difficult or impossible for conscientious researchers to completely and accurately cite the original data source.

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Claire Prechtel-Kluskens, a microfilm projects archivist at NARA, Washington, D.C., served as NGS registrar (1996–98) and director (1998–2000). She can be reached at cklusken@yahoo.com. Opinions expressed are her own and may not reflect the policies of NARA. All mistakes are her own. She thanks Marian Smith, historian, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, for sharing her vast knowledge and insights into U.S. immigration records over the years.