

St. Albans Passenger Arrival Records

By Michael J. Leclerc

The border between the United States and Canada is the largest unpatrolled border in the world. The friendly relationship that has existed between the two countries for most of the past two centuries has allowed these thousands of miles to remain free of the fences, ditches, and other barriers erected between other countries, including the United States and Mexico.

Since the time of earliest settlement, people have been able to move back and forth across this border freely. No records were kept of people crossing the borders in either direction until the late eighteenth century. By this time, massive waves of immigrants were coming to the United States from Europe. Many of these individuals came through Canada before coming to the States, especially those coming from the British Isles. There were two major reasons for immigrants to take this route.

Canada was and continues to be part of the British Commonwealth of Nations. At that time people living in Canada were subjects of the British monarch. Thus those emigrating from Scotland, England, and Ireland were not really leaving the country when they came to Canada. The second reason for immigrating to Canada first was because of the immigrant quota system. Severe restrictions were placed on the number of individuals who could enter the United States from Europe. There were relatively few restrictions on those coming from Canada however. Thus there was incentive for immigrants to go to Canada first, then move on to the United States.

In 1891 the United States Congress overhauled the system of tracking immigration to this country. Among other things they required the keeping of certain information on passenger lists. They also created the Bureau of Immigration, which today is known as the Immigration and Naturalization Service. As part of this overhaul, the Bureau of Immigration asked the government of Canada to allow U.S. Commissioners of Immigration to be stationed in Canadian ports such as Halifax, Montréal, Québec, and Vancouver.

Border crossing stations had been set up across the entire border by 1895 and Canadian shipping and rail companies had agreed to keep manifests of all passengers. U.S. agents were allowed to examine incoming passengers in Canadian ports. The first U.S. immigration inspector was originally stationed in Montréal. By 1895 he had relocated to St. Albans, Vermont. Thus the entire record series is commonly known as the "St. Albans Passenger Lists" or the "St. Albans Border Crossings."

The records of these border crossings from 1895 to 1954 are available from the National Archives and Records Administration in several series:

Manifests	
M1464	Manifests of Passengers Arriving in the St. Albans, Vermont District through Canadian Pacific and Atlantic Ports, 1895-1954 (608 reels)
M1465	Manifests of Passengers Arriving in the St. Albans, Vermont, District through Canadian Pacific Ports, 1929-1949 (25 reels)
Indexes	
M1461	Soundex Index to Canadian Border Entries through the St. Albans, Vermont, District, 1895-1924 (400 reels)
M1462	Alphabetical Index to Canadian Border Entries through Small Ports in Vermont, 1895-1924 (6 reels)
M1463	Soundex Index to Entries into the St. Albans, Vermont, District through Canadian Pacific and Atlantic Ports, 1924-1952 (98 reels)
M1478	Card Manifests (Alphabetical) of Individuals Entering through the Port of Detroit, Michigan, 1906-1954 (117 reels)

This series of films is an invaluable aid if your family was involved in the massive migration from Europe through Canada into the U.S., or if your ancestors were French-Canadians or other long-time inhabitants who moved to the United States at the same time. These films are available at the National Archives in Washington, DC, many of the regional branches, LDS Family History Library, the New England Historic Genealogical Society, and many other major repositories throughout the country. Don't overlook this resource, even if it appears it is the wrong time frame for your ancestors!

These lists are valuable even for people whose ancestors crossed the border prior to 1895. How? If immigrants came to the U.S. in the 1870s or 1880s and left family behind in Canada, they may have gone back to visit after 1895. In that event, they would be captured in the border crossing lists when they were returning to their homes in the U.S.

The Soundex records through 1924 have a box in the upper right hand corner titled "Serial No." In this space there should be three numbers recorded. This is the volume number, the page number, and the line number for the entry of a particular person. For example, the card for Josephine (Lavallee) LeClerc shows that she entered the United States on October 30, 1919. The numbers recorded are 517-47-13. Turning to page 47 in volume 517 finds her entry recorded on line number 13. The manifests are filmed by volume number. The page numbers are stamped in the lower left-hand corner of each sheet. Remember that it sometimes took up to three frames to film an entire sheet. The number will only appear in the corner of the actual sheet, not in the corner of each frame.

Ship passenger lists usually included several different manifests for each ship, with different information being recorded for several different groups of people. For example, The S.S. *Montcalm* arrived in St. John, New Brunswick, February 7, 1926. The first manifest, list A, included all aliens who had sailed from the port of Greenock January 30, 1926. The second manifest was a list of United States citizens sailing from Liverpool on January 29. Next is a list of aliens sailing from Liverpool. The next list included aliens sailing from the port of Belfast on January 30. The last manifest included more aliens sailing from Greenock.

As can be seen from the above example, it is important to note from the card whether or not the person crossing the border was a United States citizen. The place of birth is not the determinate. If an individual had been naturalized, they would be listed on the manifest of United States citizens even if they had been born in another country.

The Soundex cards contain almost as much information as the original record itself. For example, the Soundex card for Onésime Leclerc, who entered the U.S. in 1919 contains the following information:

Port	Montreal, Can.
Manifest	3-26-1920
Date	8-22-1919
Place of Birth	So. Durham, Canada
Age	21
Sex	M
Marital Status	Single
Occupation	Harness Maker
Read	Yes
Write	Yes
Race	French
Nationality	Canada
Last Permanent Residence	So Durham, Can.

Name and Address of nearest relative or friend in country from which alien came	Fr. Olivier, So. Durham, Que.
Ever to US	No
Passage Paid By	Self
Destination, and name and complete address of relative or friend to join there	Providence, RI Uncle A. Leclerc, 6 Alma Street
Money Shown	150.00
Ever arrested and departed or excluded from admission	No
Purpose in coming and time remaining	Perm.
Head tax status	CRR 139608
Height	5ft 6 in
Complexion	Dk
Hair	Bro
Eyes	Bro
Distinguishing Marks	none

The actual manifest contains all of the above information. It also includes the following information:

Head tax status	CPR, 139619
Able to read what language	French
Whether having a ticket to final destination	No
Whether alien intends to return to country whence came after engaging temporarily in laboring pursuits in US	No
Whether alien intends to become a citizen of the US	No
Ever in an almshouse, or institution for care and treatment of the insane or supported by charity	No
Whether a polygamist	No
Whether an anarchist	No
Whether a person who believes in or advocates the overthrow by force or violence the Government of the United States	No
Whether coming by reason of any offer, solicitation, promise, or agreement expressed or implied, to labor in the United States	No
Condition of health, mental and physical	Good
Deformed or crippled	No
Date of Examination	8/27

Let's take a look at the significant genealogical information included here. A physical description including height and coloration, his exact place of birth; the name of his father and the place his father was living in 1919; the name of his uncle with his uncle's address; and the fact that he had decided to immigrate to the United States permanently.

After 1924 the land crossings no longer kept a long-form manifest. A manifest card system was used to track these crossings. The cards are filed with the cards indexing the passenger lists for ships, which continue to be recorded. I found my grandfather Joseph Ruel crossing into the United States through the port of Newport, Vermont, with his wife Yvonne and their five children: Roger, Simonne, Renaud, Yvette, and Marie Reine on March 19, 1926. There was a cross-reference card for his wife and each of the children that referred me back to the card for Joseph. In addition to the information above, there was a citation on the back of the card indicating his alien registration number, AR2911043. Using this number I can request a copy of his alien registration file from the Immigration and Naturalization Service under the Freedom of Information Act. Another citation indicates that his alien registration and date of immigration were verified in 1941.

The information maintained on manifest lists continued to change as the twentieth century wore on. In addition, a new kind of manifest starts to appear in the last years of the lists. By the 1940s and 1950s air travel was becoming commonplace. The airlines were also required to keep manifests. The manifest for KLM Royal Dutch Airlines Flight KL656 in March of 1954 lists the names of the crew members and their nationality. The plane departed Orly, France March 18 and Shannon, Ireland, March 19. It also departed from Montreal the same day and landed in Chicago, Illinois, the same day. The names of the ten passengers on the plane are recorded, along with the number of pieces of luggage and the weight of that luggage.

The St. Albans border crossing lists are invaluable sources of information for those researching both U.S. and Canadian ancestors. If your ancestor immigrated to this country, they may have returned home for a visit and be recorded. If your ancestors are from Canada, they may appear on the lists when they go to visit a family member who had immigrated to the U.S. They are well worth the effort it takes to use them, despite their drawbacks.