

Surprises from the St. Albans Canadian Border Crossing Records

John M. Hoenig discovers these confusing records can lead to breakthroughs

IF YOUR RELATIVE arrived in the United States between 1895 and 1952 you might do very well to consider the Canadian border crossing records known as the St. Albans Records. These records are poorly known, misunderstood and somewhat confusing. But, they are a treasure trove, and useful in surprising ways.

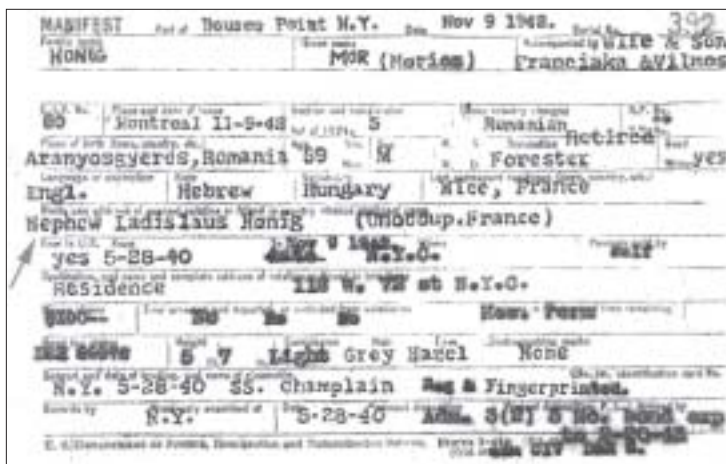
A Three-day Trip to Montreal

My father and his family lived in Nice, France, for a short time before they came to America via the port of New York in June 1940, as visitors.

Two years later, in order to become permanent residents in the US, they had to leave the country and re-enter. The easiest way to do this was to take the Delaware and Hudson train to Montreal.

I knew there should be a record of their re-entry into the country, but I couldn't imagine it would tell me anything interesting. I already had the passenger manifest for their arrival as visitors. But, the experts advise that you should get all of the records for all of your relatives. So, on one of my trips to the National Archives, I decided to look at the border crossing records, and I found... absolutely nothing.

Then I read Marian Smith's article on border crossing records



Card manifest for Mor (Moriez) Honig's re-entry into the United States at Rouses Point, New York, in 1942. The document was in the Soundex index to entries through the St. Albans, VT, district. Of note is the entry for a previously unknown relative "Ladislaus Honig, nephew" under nearest relative in place whence applicant came. The card manifest also provides information on Honig's original arrival in New York and his place of residence there.

(see further readings) in which she described the records as extremely valuable though confusing. I decided to try again and this time I hit pay dirt: the card manifest for their return.

Under "nearest relative or friend in country whence applicant came" was listed Ladislaus Honig. He was my grandfather's nephew and was living in "unoc-

cupied France". This was quite a jolt. I had never heard of Ladislaus despite having interviewed my grandmother about family history. So, I'd discovered a new relative. Two years earlier, when my father's family first arrived in New York, they listed their neighbor in Nice as their nearest relative or friend back home. This suggests that Ladislaus may have arrived in France between 1938 and 1940.

There was a flood of similar, short trips to Canada from the US starting in 1940 when the immigration laws changed. People who had entered the US illegally in the 1930s or even earlier, or who overstayed their visit, needed to re-enter the country to become legal residents. Thus, these records may be surprisingly useful.

US Records of Canadian Arrivals, 1895-1952

People are very familiar with Ellis Island passenger arrival manifests. These were filled out by the steamship companies for the US Government. In the 1880s, at the height of immigration, many people came to the US from Europe via Canada. The steamship companies promoted this as a cheaper and easier alternative for direct travel to the US. The US Government then decided it needed

US National Archive microfilm publications pertaining to Canadian border crossings:	
M1481	Alphabetical card manifests of upstate New York arrivals (first publication) July 1929-April 1956
M1482	Alphabetical card manifests of upstate New York arrivals (second publication) July 1929-April 1956
M1461	Soundex index to Canadian border entries through St. Albans, VT, district, 1895-1924
M1462	Alphabetical index to Canadian border entries through small ports in Vermont, 1895-1924
M1463	Soundex index to entries into the St. Albans, VT, district through Canadian Pacific & Atlantic ports, 1924-1952
M1464	Manifests of passengers arriving in the St. Albans, VT, district through Canadian Pacific and Atlantic ports, 1895-1954
M1465	Manifests of passengers arriving in the St. Albans, VT, district through Canadian Pacific ports, 1929-1949
M1480	Manifests of alien arrivals at Buffalo, Lewiston, Niagara Falls and Rochester, New York, 1902-1954

better records so it negotiated with the steamship companies to have them fill out separate passenger manifests for those declaring their intention to continue on to the US. Thus, passenger manifests for ships arriving at ports like Halifax, St. John, Montreal and Quebec City were prepared on US Government forms just like those used at Ellis Island and other US ports. Later, name indexes were prepared for these manifests so it is not necessary to know the ship, port and date in order to find the manifest.

Some people arrived in Canada without the intention of immediately continuing on to the States. In this case, their names should appear on the separate passenger manifests prepared by the steamship companies for the Canadian government. These manifests are in the Canadian National Archives. However, if a person later decided to come to the US as an immigrant, the US border crossing record should list the original arrival of the person in Canada. Thus, the US record can be extremely useful for finding the Canadian record.

The Record Groups

The National Archives has issued eight microfilm publications pertaining to Canadian border crossing records, including the passenger manifests for ships arriving at Canadian ports. There are both alphabetical and Soundex indexes to the names in the records, although it is not always clear which index to use. M1481 and M1482 are alphabetical indexes. The two record groups differ only in the ports of entry they cover. I

thought my family's records would be indexed in this group but they weren't. I then tried the Soundex index in M1463. This is where I found my family's records. The "index" actually consisted of "card manifests" that contained all of the information collected. Note that St. Albans refers to the central data collection point. Originally, all the records were held in Montreal but later the Immigration and Naturalization Service transferred them to the St. Albans district office and the records became known as the St. Albans records. This choice of names is unfortunate as it undoubtedly causes some people to miss their significance. M1464 and M1465 contain ship passenger manifests for Canadian ports. These look just like the manifests for ships arriving at US ports such as New York. The two record groups differ only in the ports they cover.

These records are poorly understood and somewhat confusing but they contain real treasures. If you suspect a relative entered the US via Canada, or left the US in order to re-enter for immigration purposes, it may be well worth the effort to look for border crossing records.

Further readings: Smith, Marian L., 2000. *By Way of Canada: U.S. Records of Immigration Across the U.S. Canadian Border, 1895-1954 (St. Albans Lists)*. Prologue 32(3). Available online at http://www.archives.gov/publications/prologue/fall_2000_us_canada_immigration_records_1.html



Family Tree DNA

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