

USING PASSPORTS AND PASSPORT APPLICATIONS FOR GENEALOGICAL RESEARCH

by Jan Roseneder



In 1931, my great-grandmother applied for her passport which was issued in London, England. She probably travelled up for the day from her home in Haslemere, Surrey, which is on a direct train line to the City. A month later, the passport was stamped for entry into Canada at Toronto. Four months later, an exit stamp appeared for Vancouver and only a few days later an entry permit was issued at San Francisco for the United States. One month later an exit stamp from the port of New York appeared and that was that. The passport expired and a new one was never issued, although it remained in her possession until her death, when it came to her youngest child. In 1973, I had the chance to see the passport and was able to match up the dated entries with my mother's story of her one and only contact with Grandmother Kingshott, who travelled across Canada and the States visiting her 5 immigrant children and their families. Having done her duty she never left England again.

The passport, however, remained as a souvenir of the trip and allowed me to copy her rather grim passport photograph - one of only three I could ever find of this ancestor. It also gave her date and place of birth, a fact not fully appreciated until checking birth indexes for a Mary Moore in England! If only some of my other ancestors had passports - or if only I could find the ones that did exist.

A BRIEF HISTORY

The word "passport" combines two French terms, "passer": to pass, and "porte": a door. In ancient times, strangers had to have permission to pass through the door of a walled city. As a physical document, the passport has existed for centuries. Early pilgrims, making their way to one of the great holy sites of the middle ages, carried an official document signed by their local priest or bishop, identifying the individual and their destination, requesting the aid of churches and monasteries along the route. As the pilgrim reached their evening destination, the document would be handed over to the priest or monk in charge of accommodation and upon leaving in the morning the document was given back

to the pilgrim with an official signature or seal attesting to the presence of the pilgrim and their good behaviour. At the end of the pilgrimage, this would be given to the officials of the holy site and the pilgrim would then receive confirmation of the indulgence carried by that particular pilgrim way. Even today, pilgrims travelling to sites such as Santiago de Compostela in Spain are issued a booklet in which each overnight stop is stamped with the shell emblem of St. James - to confirm that they really did make the pilgrimage (as opposed to driving down in a day, perhaps?).

Another form of passport used in earlier times was commonly called a "pauper's passport" but was actually a Settlement Certificate, which in England was a document issued by a parish assuming responsibility for an individual as a member of that parish. This document was particularly important to anyone who wished to travel to another area because, should they fall upon hard times and become a pauper, this document allowed them to travel back to their original parish which was then bound to support them. An excellent detailed description of these passports, how to interpret them and where to find them appears in the publication Elizabeth Simpson Talks About Paupers' Passports (#8).

As countries became more organized and citizenship became official, the passport assumed more importance until now travel between most countries requires such a document. The information requested in a passport application is extensive and not all of it appears on the actual passport itself. Most of the time, full name, date and place of birth, country of citizenship and date and place where the passport was issued is all that is revealed by the document, along with the usual photo. In fact, if you think back to the last time you filled out your application, you know that this particular record holds much more: full names of parents, date and place of arrival in the country and date and place of citizenship being conferred if you weren't born there, names of referees, etc. Imagine, then, how useful these application records would be from the point of view of genealogical research.

UNITED STATES

In the United States, the passport has existed since colonial times. In the southeastern part of the country, for instance, the movement of individuals between states quite often required an official document. Many of these passports have been collected and recorded by Dorothy Williams Potter in her book, *Passports of Southeastern Pioneers: 1770-1823* (see #7 below), which is held in the Reference Collection at the Main Branch of Calgary Public Library, 4th floor (R929.375 POT). These documents include those issued to travellers in the Spanish-held areas of the Mississippi Valley, Natchez area and west Florida, ones issued by the U.S. War Department and various Indian agencies, as well as passports drawn up by territories such as Mississippi and states like Georgia.

Many of these are very basic. For example on p. 85 in a note dated August 10th, 1801, we read that "Harris Wiley having lawfull Business is hereby permitted to pass thro. the Cherokee Country to Georgia." Others include a detailed description of the bearer (as on p.55): "forty years of age, five feet ten inches... Grey Eyes, Comman Mouth, ordinary Forehead, Short Chin, dark complexion, black hair and Eyebrows, and Oval face." In 1811, the state of Georgia ordered a passport prepared for "William Thornhill... his wife and five children, and his wife's mother... from the Beaufort District South Carolina" so they could travel through the Creek Nation lands. The index to this volume includes more than 2,000 individual names and is well worth checking.

In 1856, the right of various states or counties to issue passports ceased and all such activity was centred in the Department of State which has issued American passports since 1789. However, except for a few short periods such as the Civil War or World War I, it was not until June 21, 1941, that American citizens were required to have a passport to travel abroad. Nevertheless for the period from 1810 through 1925, the State Department issued over 1.5 million passports and of these slightly over 130,000 were before 1873. Many of these passports were issued for entire families as both wife and children were included with the head of the family.

The Passport applications from October 1795 through March 1925, which are held at the United States National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), are available for public research. These applications, which contain so much more information than on the actual passport, include name, date and place of birth, a physical description of the individual and the names of wives and/or children travelling on the same passport. Since December of 1914, a photograph was also required. Those not born in the United States would usually state the place and date of naturalization together with the date of immigration and sometimes the ship upon which the applicant travelled. Some applications have notes appended, such as a comment on the variant spelling of a last name or the intended destination and reason for travel. The applications and some indexes can be searched at the National Archives Building in Washington, DC., on Registers and Indexes for Passport Applications (National Archives Microfilm Publication M1371 and M1372) . There are many applications in existence for time periods not yet indexed. It is also important to keep in mind that one individual may have had several passports over the course of years since earlier issues only lasted for two years. Other types of American passports were also issued. Emergency ones were issued abroad for various reasons and these too are on M1371. Special passports, especially diplomatic are also included.

A visit to the National Archives in Washington DC allows the researcher to search both microfilmed and actual applications. A written request for a copy of an application may be directed to the NARA:

National Archives & Records Administration

7th St. & Pennsylvania Ave NW
Washington, DC 20408 USA

It is not necessary to visit the Archives, however, as M1371 and M1372 have both been filmed by the Genealogical Society of Utah and are available in the Family History Library in Salt Lake. As with other holdings, they may also be ordered on microfilm through an LDS Family History Branch Library, such as that in Calgary. However, there are over 2,000 microfilm in this set so a careful study of the library catalogue's records is necessary. These can be accessed on Fiche 0722 of the Author/Title portion of the Library catalogue on microfiche, under the headings of National Archives Microfilm Publication 1371 and 1372. However, the library's record also notes that their copy is incomplete.

For a more detailed account of US passport applications and their use, please consult the article by Kathie O. Nicastro and Claire Prechtel-Klusken mentioned in the bibliography below.

GREAT BRITAIN

The British passport in one form or another has existed since the 14th century, although a separate Passport Office did not exist until 1855. The modern system came into being during World War I, with an official Act passed in 1914, which required every person, including British subjects, to show that they were not aliens. The passport in Britain, as in most countries, evolved from a manuscript sheet with a seal, to a sheet folded in four. From 1898 to 1923, it existed as an eight-page folded book, then became the modern form. Most recently, the British passport, like those of all other countries in the European Economic Community, now has a generic EEC passport cover, although each country still issues for its own citizens. The passports of the early 20th century included a more detailed physical description than nowadays; the colour of eyes and hair have been dropped from the most recent.

The passport itself has always been a prerogative of the Foreign Office and the registers of passports issued from 1795 to 1948 are held in four hundred and ten volumes within the Foreign Office Archives at the Public Records Office in Kew (FO610). These registers are numbered in chronological order with a new numerical sequence beginning with each appointment of a new Foreign Secretary! However, there is a twenty-five volume name index covering the time periods from 1851 to 1862 and 1874 to 1916. Among other information that the registers contain is the intended destination of the applicant.

CANADA

In colonial times, prior to 1862, passports were issued by local mayors to

residents other than Native North Americans. British subjects did not require a Canadian passport, and Canadians travelling to Europe had to obtain a passport at the Foreign Office in London. With the outbreak of the American Civil War, however, it became necessary for Canadian residents to be able to satisfy American authorities of their national identity and the Governor General of the time, Viscount Monck, introduced a centralized passport system. In 1867, the responsibility for this passed to the Secretary of State and from there to provincial lieutenant governors, where it remained until 1895. Canadian citizens were eligible for a passport as a British subject, either as a matter of courtesy as a naturalized subject, or as a right through birth. Overall responsibility for passports continued to rest with the Secretary of State until 1946, when jurisdiction was transferred to the Department of External Affairs, which then obtained many of the archival records from previous years.

Canadian passport applications contain considerably more information than appears on the passport itself but the passports themselves have changed very little over the years. The current blue-covered booklet has existed since 1947 but in the early part of the 20th century a multi-folded folio was the norm. Since the major purpose is to physically identify the holder, colour of hair and eyes, height and weight, and a photograph are all included. Personal information such as full name, date and place of birth are also stated.

Passports from 1891 to 1920 are included in Record Group 25, part of the Department of External Affairs records at the Federal Archives Division of the National Archives of Canada.

However, who has access to these is not easily determined. There does not appear to be any indexes and it is not clear to which years the Freedom of Information Act applies. It would be best to contact the National Archives directly if you wish to search for the passport of an ancestor or collateral relative:

Reference & Researcher Services
National Archives of Canada
395 Wellington St.
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0N3

FALSE or TEMPORARY PASSPORTS

It is important to keep in mind that some passports that exist are in fact false documents. This is particularly true of the many protective passports issued by Sweden's Raoul Wallenberg and some other countries during World War II. Many Hungarians of Jewish descent were able to find safety through the use of a Swedish passport. At the same time, some of the information such as date of birth and physical description were usually correct, although sometimes names and place of birth were slightly altered. More than 15,000 protective passports were issued by Wallenberg and his assistants and many of these still exist.

Two reels of microfilm at the library Salt Lake consist of passports, visas, repatriation papers and similar documents issued by the United States for both North and South Americans in German-occupied Europe for the years 1941 through 1947. Many of these individuals had been interred as enemy aliens and the passports, etc. were issued on a temporary basis simply to allow the holder to legally travel to their homes.

[Nansen passports issued to refugees from countries such as the Soviet Union after the fall of the Russian empire were also used as temporary travel documents and contain personal information.]

VISAS

One other aspect that appears in the passport itself but never with the application is the visa. Many countries, now and earlier, require a special visa permitting citizens of other countries to enter. For instance, during World War II, naturalized Canadians (ie., those not born in Canada) had to have a visa attached to their passport in order to enter the United States. Nowadays, Canadians must have a visa to enter Australia (although Canada does not require a visa from an Australian!). Visas are given for specific time periods and are attached to the passport. They may include such information as when and how the individual was entering the country, length and place stayed, occupation and reasons for travel. This information can also be useful for the genealogical researcher.

SUMMARY

As mentioned, every country requires and issues its own passports. The records for these and the applications themselves, however, do not seem to be easily found. They are not considered genealogical records and their location and accessibility varies greatly from nation to nation. It's obvious that considerably more research needs to be done for this useful resource. In the meantime, however, it might be useful to check out whether one of your ancestors may have acquired a passport at some point.

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