



A Thumbnail Guide to Beginning Your Research for Danish Immigrant Ancestors

Work backwards. Collect as much information as possible on the children of your immigrant ancestors, the ancestors themselves, and any known siblings in the U.S. or Canada. Typical information sources include the following, but there are many others you may come across:

- Death/burial, marriage and birth/baptismal records (including marriage applications)
- Obituaries and tombstone inscriptions
- 40th or 50th anniversary newspaper articles
- Newspaper articles for 'round' (80, 90, 100) birthdays
- Funeral home records
- Church records (especially Lutheran)
- Federal census information, beginning in 1940 and working backwards
- State census information (some states have mid-decade state censuses; others don't)
- Declarations of intent and final naturalization petitions for foreign-born males over 21 (before 1920) and all foreign-born individuals after 1920. Before 1920 minor children and wives automatically became citizens when the male head of household did; children who had reached majority before then had to apply in their own names.
- County and town histories in the area(s) of settlement
- Danish Brotherhood in America records (found at FHGC and at the Danish American Library & Archives at Dana College in Blair, NE); Danish Sisterhood of America records, and similar fraternal membership organizations
- Social Security applications
- WWI draft registration records
- Land records, including homestead files
- Online sources, such as the Ellis Island passenger arrival records (NYC arrivals 1892-1924) and other sources on "Useful Websites for Genealogical Research" handout, and the USGenWeb for the area(s) in which the immigrants lived.

Once you've gathered the above materials, or if you have family documents such as correspondence from relatives in the home country, photographs or postcards, it should be possible to form a picture of when they came to this country, where they settled, and likely, where they came from. Creating a timeline of the life of each immigrant is a useful idea for keeping track of your information.

Be aware that many Danish immigrants Americanized their names, and their original names may be quite different. You will need to have some idea of what the names were likely to have been in Denmark before searching Danish records. This is sometimes straightforward (Jørgen and Margrethe becomes Jorgen and Margaret), but other times is more difficult to figure out (Kelgor was once Kjeldgaard; Brown was changed from Bruhn). Family branches may not keep the same name, and in Denmark women kept their birth names throughout life until the early 20th century. In addition, there are 3 Danish letters not found in English: æ, ø and å.

The Genealogy Center provides translation and research services. See our brochure or the museum webpage for more detailed information.