

# Three Eras of US Immigration and Nationality Records

EARLY  
18<sup>th</sup> & 19<sup>th</sup> Century

GREAT WAVE  
Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century

RECENT  
Late 20<sup>th</sup> Century

1820	1830	1840	1850	1860	1870	1880	1890	1900	1910	1920	1930	1940	1950	1960	1970	1980	
<b>Customs Lists, 1820-1892</b>							<b>Immigration Lists, 1892-1954</b>										
							<b>Border Arrival Manifests, 1895-1954</b>										
							<b>Immigration Correspondence, 1893-1944</b>										
										<b>Visa Files, 1924-44</b>							
										<b>Registry Files, 1929-44</b>							
										<b>AR-2</b>							
													<b>A-Files, 1944 - present</b>				
<b>Court Naturalization Records, 1790-1992</b>																	
												<b>Certificate Files, 1906-1956</b>			<b>A-Files, 1944-</b>		
												<b>Natz Corresp., 1906-1944</b>					

**NON-INS Records**

**INS Records at NARA**

**INS Records at USCIS**

# Researching USCIS Records

## EARLY Era, 18<sup>th</sup> & 19<sup>th</sup> Century

### What

### Where

<p><b>Customs Lists, 1820-1892</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Records of the US Customs Service</li> <li>Surviving records of passengers arriving from foreign ports to US ports of entry</li> </ul>	<p><b>National Archives</b>, Record Group 36</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><a href="http://www.archives.gov/research/immigration/">http://www.archives.gov/research/immigration/</a></li> </ul> <p>Also online</p>
<p><b>Court Naturalization Records, 1790-1906</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The original and only records of naturalizations by courts, including Federal, State, and local courts</li> </ul>	<p><b>Federal court</b> records at the <b>National Archives</b>, Record Group 21</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Available at the National Archives and some online</li> <li><a href="http://www.archives.gov/research/naturalization/">http://www.archives.gov/research/naturalization/</a></li> </ul> <p><b>State and local court</b> records at courthouses, State archives, historical societies, etc.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Some records and indices online across various websites</li> </ul>

## GREAT WAVE Era, Early-Mid 20<sup>th</sup> Century

### What

### Where

<p><b>Passenger Arrival Manifests</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Immigration Lists, 1892-1954</b></li> <li><b>Border Arrival Manifests, 1895-1954</b></li> </ul>	<p><b>National Archives</b></p> <p>Records of the US Immigration and Naturalization Service, Record Group 85</p> <p><a href="http://www.archives.gov/research/immigration/">http://www.archives.gov/research/immigration/</a></p>
<p><b>Chinese Exclusion Files, 1882-1944</b></p> <p>Case files opened at ports of entry and departure under the Chinese Exclusion Acts.</p>	<p><b>National Archives</b></p> <p><a href="http://www.archives.gov/research/chinese-americans/index.html">http://www.archives.gov/research/chinese-americans/index.html</a></p>
<p><b>Immigration Correspondence, 1893-1944</b></p> <p>Case files covering appeals, investigations, deportations, and any matter requiring a decision from INS in Washington, DC</p>	<p><b>National Archives</b></p> <p>Records of the US Immigration and Naturalization Service, Record Group 85, Entry 7, Entry 9</p> <p>See guidance and handouts at <a href="http://www.uscis.gov/research">http://www.uscis.gov/research</a></p>
<p><b>Naturalization Correspondence, 1906-1944</b></p> <p>Case files covering every conceivable question and matter regarding naturalization and citizenship.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Name Index to Bureau of Naturalization Correspondence Files, 1906 – 1946, NARA Identifier 1593296</li> </ul>	<p><b>National Archives</b></p> <p>Records of the US Immigration and Naturalization Service, Record Group 85, Entry 26</p> <p>See guidance and handouts at <a href="http://www.uscis.gov/research">http://www.uscis.gov/research</a></p>
<p><b>Court Naturalization Records, 1906-1956</b></p> <p>Original records of naturalization and some repatriations performed judicially in Federal, State, and local courts.</p>	<p><b>Federal court</b> records at the <b>National Archives</b>, Record Group 21</p> <p><a href="http://www.archives.gov/research/naturalization/">http://www.archives.gov/research/naturalization/</a></p> <p><b>State and Local Courts</b></p> <p>Records at courthouses, State archives, historical societies, etc.</p>
<p><b>Visa Files, from July 1, 1924, to March 31, 1944<sup>i</sup></b></p> <p>Original, official arrival records of immigrants admitted for permanent residence under provisions of the Immigration Act of 1924</p>	<p><b>USCIS Genealogy Program</b></p> <p><a href="http://www.uscis.gov/genealogy">http://www.uscis.gov/genealogy</a></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Some visas relate to re-entries of immigrants who first arrived before 1924.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Registry Files, from March 2, 1929, to March 31, 1944<sup>1</sup></b></p> <p>Original, official records documenting the creation of immigrant arrival records for persons who entered the United States prior to July 1, 1924, and for whom no arrival record could be found.</p>	<p><b>USCIS Genealogy Program</b></p> <p><a href="http://www.uscis.gov/genealogy">http://www.uscis.gov/genealogy</a></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Most Registry Files relate to immigrants who arrived before 1924, and naturalized between 1929 and 1944.</li> </ul>

# Researching USCIS Records

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## Microfilmed Alien Registration Forms, from August 1, 1940, to March 31, 1944. <sup>1</sup>

Microfilmed copies of 5.5 million Alien Registration Forms (Form AR-2) completed by all aliens age 14 and older, resident in or entering the United States between the dates given.

## USCIS Genealogy Program

<http://www.uscis.gov/genealogy>

- Some arrivals date back to 1870's, 1880's

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## Certificate Files (C-Files), from September 27, 1906, to April 1, 1956.

INS copies of records relating to all U.S. naturalizations in Federal, state, county, or municipal courts, overseas military naturalizations, replacement of old law naturalization certificates, and the issuance of Certificates of Citizenship in derivative, repatriation, and resumption cases.

### C-Files Series:

- Naturalization "C" C-Files – Duplicate Declaration, Petition, and Certificate of Naturalization, and additional related documents.
- Derivative "A" C-Files - Certificates of Citizenship documenting derivative or "acquired" citizenship subsequent to birth (i.e., through the naturalization of a parent or a spouse). These are NOT A-Files.
- "AA" Files - Certificate of Citizenship documenting derivative or "acquired" citizenship by birth outside the United States or its possessions (i.e., child of US citizen born abroad).
- "OM" Files - Naturalization files related to persons naturalized overseas while members of the Armed Forces of the United States during World War II.
- "OS" Files - Naturalization files created for members of the US Armed Forces naturalized outside the United States under the Act of June 30, 1953.
- "B" Files - Certificates of Naturalization or repatriation issued to persons who regained US citizenship, prior to January 13, 1941, either by taking the prescribed oath of renunciation and allegiance before a naturalization court in the US or before a US diplomatic or consular officer abroad, following the loss of citizenship by reason of service in the armed forces of an allied foreign country in WW I or WW II, or by voting in a foreign political election during WW II. - Not duplicated in court records.
- "D" Files – Same as "B" above, but Certificates of Naturalization or repatriation issued to persons who regained US citizenship, on or after January 13, 1941.
- "3904/-" Files - Containing applications to resume citizenship by persons who lost citizenship as described under "B" and "D" files above, but who never applied for a certificate and for whom no prior certificate file exists.
- "OL" Files - "Old Law" Naturalization Certificates issued by INS to replace naturalization certificates which were lost, destroyed, or mutilated, where the original naturalization certificate was granted under the procedure in effect prior to the Act of June 29, 1906.
- "129/-" Files - Files documenting the repatriation of women who lost US citizenship by marriage to an alien prior to 1922, and who resumed US citizenship under the Act of June 25, 1936.

## USCIS Genealogy Program

<http://www.uscis.gov/genealogy>

- Some arrivals date back to 1860's, birthdates to 1840's

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## Alien Files (A-files) below 8 million

- Aliens registered between August 1940 and May 1, 1951

Individual alien case files (A-files) became the official file for all immigration records created or consolidated since April 1, 1944 (any case active after April 1, 1944). A-Files opened on immigrants or naturalized citizens who arrived prior to 1940 may contain all available INS records of that immigrant (i.e., the records created prior to 1940).

## USCIS Genealogy Program

<http://www.uscis.gov/genealogy>

Records of immigrants who are deceased / born more than 100 years ago:

## USCIS Freedom of Information Program

<http://www.uscis.gov/foia>

- Alien Files (A-files) above 8 million  
About A-files at the National Archives, see also <http://www.archives.gov/research/immigration/aliens/>

# Researching USCIS Records

## RECENT Era, Since the 1950's

### What

### Where

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**Alien Files (A-files) above 8 million**

- Can relate to any case that opened after May 1, 1951

Individual alien case files (A-files) of persons who arrived or adjusted to immigrant status on or after May 1, 1951. (If the immigrant naturalized prior to April 1, 1956, see Naturalization Certificate Files above.)

**USCIS Freedom of Information Program**

<http://www.uscis.gov/foia>

About A-files, see also

<http://www.archives.gov/research/immigration/aliens/>

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**Passenger Arrivals, 1954-1982** (air manifests, crew lists)

- Passenger arrival records after ca. 1947 contain little information

**National Archives:**

Records of the US Immigration and Naturalization Service, Record Group 85

<http://www.archives.gov/research/immigration/>

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**Court Naturalization Records, 1956-1992**

- The original and only records of naturalizations by courts, including Federal, State, and local courts
- The Immigration Act of 1990 ended judicial naturalization in 1992

**Federal court** records at the **National Archives**, Record Group 21

- Available at the National Archives and some online
- <http://www.archives.gov/research/naturalization/>

**State and local court** records at courthouses, State archives, historical societies, etc.

- Some records and indices online across various websites

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<sup>1</sup> In cases where the immigrant naturalized or the immigrant's case reopened after April 1, 1944, the Visa, Registry, or Chinese Exclusion File may have been transferred out of this historical Service record series to a C-File or an A-File.