Alien Registration Records

Alien registration records are a useful tool for tracing immigrant ancestors who arrived in the 20th century. Yet they have tended to be largely ignored by many genealogists. The sheer number of aliens who immigrated to the United States greatly enhances the odds of success provided the researcher has the patience to deal with some of the complications found in these legal records. Proof of the large number of potential records can be found in the following statistic. By 1940, government research identified almost four million resident aliens living in the United States. These were immigrants who had not completed the naturalization process. Some had never begun the process.

Alien registration records are one of the best sources for tracing immigrant ancestors who never completed the naturalization process. When the Alien Registration Act of 1940 was passed, alien immigrants were legally mandated under penalty of immediate arrest to register with the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS). This registration was usually at their nearest post office but some also went to the nearest field offices throughout the country. The registration process involved the following procedures:
1. Everyone age 14 years and above was fingerprinted.
2. Each individual was given a two-page form to fill out (the AR-2); an additional form (the AR-3) was attached with a perforation. The forms were numbered serially with an Alien Registration Number, or A-Number, assigned to the person filling out the form.
3. Completed forms were then sent to the INS for statistical coding, indexing, and filing.
4. After this, the AR-3, or Alien Registration Receipt Card, was returned to the individual, who was required to carry the card at all times.

The information on all alien immigrants was kept on file by the INS, which by this time was no longer part of the Department of Labor, as it had been previously. President Franklin Delano Roosevelt transferred immigrant services to the Department of Justice in response to the declaration of war on France by the Italian leader Mussolini. Immigration was now perceived as an issue of national security rather than an economic issue. Three weeks later on June 28, Congress passed the Alien Registration Act of 1940. Researchers should be aware that in some legal circles, citations, legal documents, and publications, this Congressional act is referred to as the Smith Act.

It was very important that resident alien immigrants in the United States have their papers readily available at all times because they were often subjected to the same harassment as illegals. The practice of facing a daily demand to present their papers had always been a common practice in many parts of Europe. Its implementation in America alarmed many liberals but their protests were ignored. Furthermore, its implementation was not the first time our government had instituted a measure of this nature.
1. In 1798, Congress passed the "Alien Act" that authorized the President to deport any aliens regarded as dangerous.
2. During the First World War, mandatory registration was implemented for all aliens from countries at war with the United States.
3. The December 7, 1941 attack on Pearl Harbor sparked another mandate from Congress ordering the registration of all alien immigrants. While the directive applied to all aliens particular scrutiny was placed on aliens from Germany, Italy, Japan, Austria, Bulgaria, and Hungary.

The congressional mandates passed in 1940 and 1941 implemented the following procedures:
1. Alien immigrants were photographed.
2. All registrants were fingerprinted.
3. They were required to list all family members and relatives in the United States and their

country of origin.
4. They were required to list the names and branch of military service for any family members who were serving in the armed forces of any country at war with the United States.

The Value of Alien Registration Information for Genealogists

While the main purpose of this law was to secure our borders in time of war, genealogists who have the patience to sift through the legal issues encounter a goldmine of information. According to provisions of the Freedom of Information Act/Privacy Act, copies of these records may be requested for personal use. Early registrations are on microfilm at the Office of Home Security, Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS). Since 9/11, the INS was taken over by the Department of Homeland Security and renamed the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS).

Records generated from July 1940 through April 1944, including A-numbers below 12,000,000 are searchable by name, date of birth, and place of birth. Copies of your ancestor's Alien Registration Files (or A-Files) may be obtained by submitting a completed G-639 form (Freedom of Information Act/Privacy Act Request) which can be downloaded at the following link: http://www.uscis.gov/sites/default/files/files/form/g-639.pdf . This link contains the forms, fees, and instructions. http://www.uscis.gov/g-639.

For current information pertaining to genealogical requests, readers are advised to visit the link listed below prior to initiating any type of search. The link will provide current guidelines for access, fees, and descriptions of what types of information are available. The following topics are included:
1. About Index Search Requests
2. About Record Requests
3. Historical Records Series
4. Certificate Files 1906-1956
5. Alien Registration Forms 1940-1944
6. Visa Files 1924-1944
7. Registry Files 1929-1944
8. A-Files Numbered Below 8 Million
9. Make a Genealogy Request
10. Genealogy Case Status Inquiries

For more information, here are two additional links of interest:
http://www.uscis.gov/history-and-genealogy/genealogy/alien-registration-forms-microfilm-1940-1944.
http://www.uscis.gov/history-and-genealogy/genealogy/files-image-gallery.

What is Record Request?

A Genealogy Record Request is a request for USCIS to retrieve a specific record or file related to a particular individual. The requester identifies the file by number, and the Genealogy program will locate, retrieve, review, duplicate, and return to the requester a copy of that record. The requester may have obtained the USCIS file number through a previous Genealogy Index Search Request or from another source. The Record Request fee for a microfilmed file is $20. The fee for a hard copy (paper) file is $35.

What is in the Records?

File content varies by the file series and according to the life story of each immigrant. Click on "Historical Records Series" at right to learn about the content of each series of records.

Should I submit Record Request?

The USCIS Genealogy program can only fulfill record requests that include a valid file number. For a list of file types and valid citations follow the links in the right hand column of this page. If you do not have a file number, or if you are unsure whether or not USCIS maintains a record of your ancestor, you should make an Index Search request prior to making a Records Request. Any USCIS file numbers included your Index Search results can be used to make a Records Request with Case ID.

If you believe you have a valid file number, you may choose to forgo the Index Search and request a Record Request *without* Case ID. For examples of valid file citations follow the "Sample File Numbers" link in the right hand column of this page. **Please note that the USCIS Genealogy Program will not provide refunds for Record Requests *without* Case ID that include an invalid citation and/or result in a "No Records" response.**

Important: A single immigrant may have several USCIS records. For example, an immigrant who entered the US in 1924 and naturalized in 1930 may have both a Visa File and a C-File. An index search returns citations for *all* of an immigrant's records, while a Records Request without Case ID will return only the specific file(s) requested. Researchers who wish to know about all of an immigrant's USCIS records should file an Index Search request.

What information do I need to make a Record Request?

To make a Record Request you will need to identify the correct file series and provide: the file number, your immigrant ancestor's name, date of birth (actual or estimated), and country of birth. If the immigrant was born less than 100 years ago you will also need to provide proof of his/her death. Please note that you are required to submit the $20 or $35 Record Request fee at the time you make your request.

The following section will highlight the various types of genealogical records currently available for research.

Historical Records Series

The USCIS Genealogy Program can provide copies of records from the five record series listed below.:

Naturalization Certificate Files (C-Files), September 27, 1906 to March 31, 1956

Naturalization Certificate Files (C-Files) are 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. Standard C-Files generally contain at least one application form (Declaration of Intention and/or Petition for Naturalization, or other application) and a duplicate certificate of

naturalization or certificate of citizenship. Many files contain additional documents, including correspondence, affidavits, or other records. Only C-Files dating from 1929 onward include photographs. The majority of C-Files exist only on microfilm.

Alien Registration Forms (Form AR-2), August 1940 to March 1944

Alien Registration Forms (Form AR-2) are copies of approximately 5.5 million Alien Registration Forms completed by all aliens age 14 and older, residing in or entering the United States between August 1, 1940 and March 31, 1944.   The two-page form called for the following information: name; name at arrival; other names used; street address; post-office address; date of birth; place of birth; citizenship; sex; marital status; race; height; weight; hair and eye color; date, place, vessel, and class of admission of last arrival in United States; date of first arrival in United States; number of years in United States; usual occupation; present occupation; name, address, and business of present employer; membership in clubs, organizations, or societies; dates and nature of military or naval service; whether citizenship papers filed, and if so date, place, and court for declaration or petition; number of relatives living in the United States; arrest record, including date, place, and disposition of each arrest; whether or not affiliated with a foreign government; signature, and fingerprint. The AR-2 files exist only on microfilm. **Important:** Alien Registration Forms AR-2 are only available for A-numbers 1 million to 5 980 116, A6 100 000 to 6 132 126, A7 000 000 to 7 043 999, and A7 500 000 to 7 759 142.

Visa Files, July 1, 1924 to March 31, 1944

Visa Files are original arrival records of immigrants admitted for permanent residence under provisions of the Immigration Act of 1924.   Visa forms contain all information normally found on a ship passenger list of the period, as well as the immigrant's places of residence for 5 years prior to emigration, names of both the immigrant's parents, and other data.   Attached to the visa in most cases are birth records or affidavits. Also attached may be marriage, military, or police records. The Visa Files exist only in hard copy (textual) format.

Registry Files, March 1929 to March 31, 1944

Registry Files are records, which document 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 later be found. Most files also include documents supporting the immigrant's claims regarding arrival and residence (i.e., proofs of residence, receipts, and employment records). The Registry Files exist only in hard copy (textual) format.

Immigrant Files (A-Files), April 1, 1944 to May 1, 1951

Immigrant Files, (A-Files) are the individual alien case files, which became the official file for all immigration records created or consolidated since April 1, 1944. A-numbers ranging up to approximately 6 million were issued to aliens and immigrants within or entering the United States between 1940 and 1945. The 6 million and 7 million series of A-numbers were issued between circa 1944 and May 1, 1951. The Immigrant Files exist only in hard copy (textual) format. Only A-File documents dated to May 1, 1951, are releasable under the Genealogy Program.

A-Files Numbered Below 8 Million

Background

The Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) began issuing each immigrant an alien registration number in 1940, and on April 1, 1944, began using this number to create individual files, called Alien Files or A-Files. From 1944 to 1956 A-Files contained all records of any active case of an immigrant not yet naturalized. Upon naturalization all records were moved to a consolidated C-File and the A-File ceased to exist.

Who had an A-File below 8 million?

All immigrants admitted to the United States between April 1, 1944 and May 1, 1951, should have an A-File numbered below 8 million unless they naturalized prior to April 1, 1956 (they will have a C-File). Also, immigrants who were issued an alien registration number prior to April 1, 1944 and whose case re-opened after that date. Cases were reopened when an immigrant filed any kind of application, for example to replace a document, obtain a border crossing card, or petition for an immigrant relative. An A-File might also be created without any action taken by the immigrant, for example if INS initiated a law enforcement action against or involving the immigrant.

Immigrants who registered between 1940 and 1944 will have an A-number below 8 million and an Alien Registration Form on microfilm, but unless their case re-opened after 1944 they will have no A-file.

The Files Today

A-Files below 8 million are just the oldest fraction of the USCIS' immense A-File series of more than 60 million case files. Inactive A-Files are stored in various locations, with the majority of older files held in the USCIS National Records Center. The oldest A-Files, numbering approximately from the 1 million series to the 5.5 million series, are often consolidated A-Files. They document immigrants who arrived prior to 1940 but whose cases re-opened after 1944. When re-opened, any prior files (Visa Files, Registry Files, etc.) were consolidated with (placed inside) the A-File and ceased to exist in their original series.

Research Value

A-Files are a rich source of biographical information in that they contain relatively modern immigration documents, all in one file. Since the early 20th century the United States collected increasing amounts of information from immigrants and A-Files from mid-century hold a wealth of data, including visas, photographs, applications, affidavits, correspondence, and more.

Index Search Issues

A-Files are indexed by name, date of birth, and place of birth. Many A-File index entries also include the port and date of arrival, and may indicate the INS district where the immigrant lived.

Record Request Issues

Because A-Files are not stored at USCIS Headquarters or the nearby Federal Records Center, retrieval of the files may take a little longer than for other file series.

A-Files may include documents containing personal information about other persons (called "third parties") who may still be living, such as the immigrant's children, other family, or neighbors. A document containing third party personal information is not releasable outside the Freedom of Information (FOIA) process, so some records received from the Genealogy Program may have some information redacted.

Where do I find an A- File number?

Some researchers find A-numbers among an immigrant's personal papers. If an immigrant naturalized after ca. 1942, they may find the A-number noted on a court naturalization records index card. Only A-Files numbered below 8 million may be requested via a Genealogy Record Request. A-Files numbered 8 million and above must be requested via the USCIS Freedom of Information/Privacy Act Program.

A-numbers below 8 million for deceased persons may be obtained by submitting a Genealogy Index Search Request on form G-1041.

Alien Registration Forms on Microfilm, 1940-1944

Background

Alien Registration (as opposed to enemy alien registration) began in August 1940 as a program intended to fingerprint and create a record of every non-citizen within the United States. The original Alien Registration Act of 1940 was a national security measure, and directed the Service to fingerprint and register every alien age 14 and older living within and entering the United States. The 1940 Act directed that a specific form be developed for the Alien Registration program. INS then introduced the Alien Registration Form (AR-2), a form individually stamped with a unique Alien Registration Number. Forms AR-2 date from August 1, 1940 to March 31, 1944.

The Forms Today

Alien Registration Forms completed between August 1940 and March 1944 were microfilmed and the originals forms were destroyed. USCIS maintains this microfilm containing 5,665,983 Alien Registration Forms (AR-2). The microfilmed forms are technically not part of the A-File series. Alien Registration Forms available from this series are as follows

A1000000 to A5980116	Resident aliens and Delayed registration, Aug 1940-Mar 1944
A6100000 to A6132126	Railroad workers, 1942-1943
A7000000 to	Children under 14 years of age, resident in US (not all children were registered),

A7043999	Aug 1940-Mar 1944
A7500000 to A7759142	Newly arriving immigrants (Consular registrations), Aug 1940-Mar 1944

Alien Registration forms on microfilm are arranged in numerical order, and are indexed by name, date of birth, and place of birth.

Research Value

Though not official arrival records, Alien Registration Forms dating from the early 1940's may be useful in documenting an individual's presence in the United States. Many resident aliens registered under the Alien Registration Act during 1940-1941 had been living in the United States for decades. Some arrived as early as the 1880's and the Alien Registration form is the agency's only record of that immigrant.

Form AR-2 asked for the information listed below. Researchers must remember that not all registrants provided all information.

- Name
- Name at time of entry to the US
- Other names used
- Address
- Date of Birth
- Citizenship/Nationality
- Gender
- Marital Status
- Race
- Height & Weight
- Hair & Eye Color
- Port, date, ship and class of admission at last arrival in US
- Date of first arrival in US
- Years lived in US
- Intended stay in US
- Usual occupation
- Present occupation
- Present employer, including address
- Club, organization, or society memberships
- Military service (Country, branch, dates)

- Date and number of Declaration of Intention (if filed), and city and State where filed.

- Date of Petition for Naturalization (if filed), and city and State where filed.

- Arrest history

- Fingerprint

- Signature

- Date and place of registration

Index Search Issues

Alien Registration forms were indexed in a way to include up to three names for each individual (aliases, alternate spellings, maiden names)--but only if the immigrant provided more than one name on the form. AR-2 index entries also include an exact date of birth (if given on the form) and place of birth (if given).

To differentiate between individuals of the same name and date of birth in AR-2 records, the most useful information is the immigrant's residence ca. 1940 (State, county, town) and/or their occupation. Family member names do not appear on the forms.

Record Request Issues

One challenge surrounding Alien Registration Numbers (A-numbers) is determining whether the number corresponds only to an AR-2 form, or whether there is an additional A-File jacket identified by the same A-number. A-numbers in the AR-2 Form range, the majority numbered from 1 million to approximately 5.6 million, may or may not relate to a physical A-File. In other words, the existence of an A-number from the early 1940's does not guarantee the existence of an A-File.

A second Forms AR-2 challenge is producing the best possible image of the record from aging microfilm. A number of factors determine the quality of any given copy, including quality of the microfilm, reader/printer machine function, and the skill or determination of the machine operator. The USCIS Genealogy Program is committed to producing the best possible image of Alien Registration Forms AR-2. In addition, the Genealogy Program is investigating methods for the future reproduction and delivery of enhanced digital images taken from the Alien Registration Forms on microfilm.

A third challenge for researchers is distinguishing the A-number from other USCIS file numbers. One series of derivative C-File numbers are also prefixed with an "A" (learn more about C-Files on the "Historical Records Series" page). Other numbers appear on other records, such as ship passenger manifests, and it is dangerously tempting to add an "A" to the number and assume it is an A-number.

Where do I find an Alien Registration Number?

If the immigrant later naturalized between ca. 1942 and 1956, you may find the A-number at the bottom of the naturalization index card maintained by the naturalization court. If that number is below ca. 5.6 million, there should be a corresponding Form AR-2. If the immigrant did not later naturalize, you may find the number on or among the immigrant's personal papers.

The best way to identify the correct A-number is to submit a Genealogy Index Search Request on form G-1041.

Certificate Files, September 27, 1906 - March 31, 1956

Background

C-Files are a product of the Basic Naturalization Act of 1906, which created the Federal Naturalization Service and required the new agency to collect and maintain duplicate copies of all court naturalization records. Initially, courts forwarded copies of Declarations of Intention, Petitions for Naturalization, and naturalization certificates to Washington, D.C. Later, Congress expanded the Naturalization Service authority to create additional C-Files relating to derivative and resumed U.S. citizenship, as well as repatriation.

The Files Today

C-Files dated 1906 to ca. 1944 (C-1 to C-6500000) were microfilmed in the 1950's. Sadly, the original files were destroyed. The only C-files below C-6500000 remaining in paper form are those that were 1) unavailable at the time of filming or 2) re-opened after microfilming for further action. Immigrants with C-Files below C-6500000 may have additional USCIS files depending on their arrival date or naturalization date. Some C-Files below C-6500000 are Consolidated C-Files and are the only file for that individual.

C-Files C-6500000 to approximately C-7700000 (to March 31, 1956) are considered "Consolidated C-Files" containing all agency records on that individual subject.

Research Value

Since 1906 standard naturalization forms called for the immigrant's name, date and place of birth, and port and date of arrival. When applicants claimed arrival after June 30, 1906, the Naturalization Service verified the arrival information by checking the original immigration record.

Despite the standardization mandated by the 1906 naturalization law, standard C-Files do vary by date and the circumstances of the naturalization. The content of a C-file usually depends upon when the person naturalized, under what provisions of law they applied, and whether or not there was any further activity in their case after naturalization. Many naturalization cases re-opened later in connection with applications for replacement (of lost) certificates, derivative citizenship claims, requests for proof of citizenship in relation to job applications, background investigations, insurance claims, or pension benefits.

C-Files also include several certificate series not duplicated in court records, such as derivative citizenship certificates (A series, AA series), and certain repatriation and resumption of citizenship files (see table below).

Index Search Issues

The most common problem in searching for C-Files is identifying one person among many of the same name and approximate date of birth. The most helpful information is:

1. The place of residence when naturalized. Unless searching for the naturalization of a soldier or woman who lost citizenship by marriage prior to 1922, this information is of immense value. Provide all places where the immigrant lived (or may have lived).

2. When trying to identify one immigrant among many with the same name, helpful information includes a street address, place of birth, names of spouse and/or children, occupation, arrival information, etc. When up to three index references match the requested immigrant exactly, reference to the actual records can help identify the correct file. The naturalization petition will show their street address and place (town) of birth, name the spouse or children (if any), or show the occupation. Any of these facts or characteristic may help to distinguish one from another.

Record Request Issues

Some C-File microfilm was poorly produced a half-century ago and has deteriorated since. In those cases record images are often faded. We aim to provide the best possible record copy, especially in these cases.

The Genealogy Program may experience problems if researchers try to submit Record Requests without a prior Index Search Request and with the wrong C-number. Some researchers confuse the naturalization court's petition number with a C-number. Others misunderstand annotations found on ship passenger lists or other documents and think they are C-numbers (or A-numbers). If these numbers relate to a file where the name is not the name provided in the request, no file will be returned and there is no refund.

C-Files may include documents containing personal information about other persons (called "third parties") who may still be living. This occurs in C-Files if/when the petition lists the minor children of the immigrant. A document containing third party personal information is not releasable outside the Freedom of Information (FOIA) process, so some records received from the Genealogy Program may have some information redacted.

Where do I find a C-File number?

Standard Certificate Files numbers can be found on original naturalization certificates or may be available from court naturalization indices since September 27, 1906. C-File numbers can always be learned by submitting a Genealogy Index Search Request on form G-1041.

Sub-Series	Description
C Certificates	Naturalization files documenting all judicial (court) naturalizations in all U.S.

	States, Territories, and Districts from September 27, 1906 to March 31, 1956
OM Certificates	Naturalization files related to persons administratively naturalized overseas while members of the Armed Forces of the United States during World War II.
OS Certificates	Naturalization files created for persons administratively naturalized outside the United States under the Act of June 30, 1953. (Korean War)
OL Certificates	"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 (which became effective September 27, 1906).
A Derivative Certificates	Certificates of Citizenship documenting derivative or "acquired" citizenship subsequent to birth (i.e., through the naturalization of a parent). **These are not A-Files.**
AA Derivative Certificates	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).
B Repatriation/ Resumption Certificates	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.
D Repatriation/ Resumption Certificates	Certificates of Naturalization or repatriation issued to persons who regained US citizenship, on or after 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.

3904 Repatriation/ Resumption Records	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.
129/ Repatriation Records	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.

Registry Files, March 2, 1929-March 31, 1944

Registry Files document the creation of official immigrant arrival records under the Registry Act of March 2, 1929 (45 Stat 1512), which applied to persons who entered the United States prior to July 1, 1924, and for whom no arrival record could later be found.

Background

The Basic Naturalization Act of 1906 first required a record of lawful entry/admission as a prerequisite to naturalization. The effect of the new law became apparent five years later, in 1911, when numerous immigrants were unable to naturalize because there was no record of their admission, or no such record could be found. These people could not naturalize until Congress provided relief with the Registry Act of 1929.

Registry Files document the first "legalization program" authorized by Congress. The law and program allowed immigrants subject to the Certificate of Arrival requirement for naturalization, but for whom no arrival record could be found, to have a record of their original arrival created. Though dating after 1929 the records actually relate to immigrant arrivals occurring many years before. Registry Files from 1929 to 1944 generally relate to immigrant arrivals between June 29, 1906 and July 1, 1924. The initial Registry program applied to immigrants who arrived before July 1, 1921. Later, as time passed, Congress moved the ending date progressively forward.

Immigrants applied for Registry through their local District Office where officers investigated, took testimony, and compiled evidence. The record was then forwarded to Washington with a recommendation as to whether or not Registry should be granted.

The Files Today

Registry Files survive in their original paper form. They contain applications, testimony, evidence, correspondence, a photo, and a decision granting or denying Registry. They are arranged by Registry File Number (i.e., R-#####) and indexed by name and number.

Research Value

Registry Files are treasures for the few genealogists whose immigrant ancestors who applied (there are

only about 1/4 million Registry Files). The Registry application is full of dates, places, and names, an account of the immigrant's travel to the United States as well as accounting for their activities (employment, residence) since arrival. In addition to the application the files typically hold correspondence, affidavits, testimony, and other related papers. Documentary evidence can include school records, insurance receipts, rental agreements, or anything establishing the immigrant's residence prior to July 1, 1924.

Index Search Issues

Because index entries for Registry Files contain only names and file numbers, and lack any information as to date and place of birth, it is often difficult to match a subject to a Registry File. This situation is often compounded by the fact that most immigrants underwent Registry proceedings so they might naturalize, yet their C-File index card makes no mention of the Registry or Registry File number. Successful searches will contain at least one alternate name, a date of birth, and the immigrant's place of residence when he/she applied for Registry between 1929 and 1944.

Record Request Issues

There are few record request issues related to retrieval of Registry Files. In some cases a Registry File was consolidated into an A-File or C-File after 1944. If so, the Genealogy Program will provide the A-File or C-File for the fee already paid.

Registry Files may include documents containing personal information about other persons (called "third parties") who may still be living, such as the immigrant's children, other family, or neighbors. A document containing third party personal information is not releasable outside the Freedom of Information (FOIA) process, so some records received from the Genealogy Program may have some information redacted.

Where do I find a Registry File number?

Registry File numbers are rarely found without a Genealogy Index Search Request. However, some R-numbers will be found on land border port card manifests now available on National Archives microfilm publications. In some cases researchers will find hints suggesting the existence of a Registry File in other immigration or naturalization documents:

- If a Petition for Naturalization is 1) granted after March 1929, and 2) indicates arrival after June 30, 1906, 3) aboard the "SS Unknown" or at an "unknown" port of entry, then the immigrant may have undergone Registry.

- If the Certificate of Arrival number shown on a Petition for Naturalization granted after March 1929 includes a letter "R" (i.e., ##-R-#####), the immigrant likely underwent Registry.

- If an index card on the Index (Soundex) to Passenger Lists of Vessels Arriving at New York, NY, July 1, 1902--December 31, 1943 (National Archives publication T621) does not reference a steamship arrival but instead contains reference to a Certificate of Registry number (i.e., CR-#####), the immigrant likely underwent Registry. Note the CR-number is not the Registry File number (R-number) needed to submit a Genealogy Record Request.

Visa Files, July 1, 1924 to March 31, 1944

Background

July 1, 1924, was the effective date of the Immigration Act of 1924. That law required all arriving immigrants to present a visa when applying for admission. Immigrants applied for the visas at U.S. Embassies and Consulates abroad, and the State Department issued visa documents to approved immigrants before they departed for the United States.

Upon arrival, Immigrant Inspectors at the ports of entry collected "visa packets" from arriving immigrants and filed them in one of two ways: NON-Immigrant visas were filed temporarily at the ports of entry and were later destroyed. Immigrant (i.e., permanent admission) visas were sent to the Central Office in Washington for filing. At the Central Office, the visas were arranged by date and port of arrival, stamped with a unique Visa File number (see Record Request Issues, below), and indexed by name, date of birth, and place of birth. Beginning April 1, 1944, all new visas were filed in A-Files and the Visa Files series closed.

Between July 1, 1924 and March 31, 1944, Visa Files were the official arrival records of immigrants admitted for permanent residence. As such, they were used on a daily basis for verification of arrival for naturalization and other purposes. Passenger lists and border port manifests remained the official record of non-immigrant admissions in those years.

The Files Today

The Visa Files series was retired to storage in 1952, and consists of more than 3.1 million paper files filling nearly 7,000 boxes. The agency routinely retrieves Visa Files from storage in response to applications for naturalization or other benefits, Freedom of Information Act requests, and Genealogy requests.

Researchers should note that if an immigrant's case re-opened after April 1, 1944, the Visa File may have been removed from the series and placed inside an A-File or a C-File (files consolidation). If the consolidation occurred between 1944 and 1975, the index will only refer to the A-File or C-File. If the consolidation took place since 1975 the Genealogy Program will perform additional steps to identify the file containing the visa packet (see Record Request Issues, below).

Research Value

Visa Files are among the most valuable immigration records for genealogical research. The application form itself contains the immigrant's complete name, date of birth, and place of birth, as well as the names of his/her parents. Also on the form will the immigrant's address(es) for the five-year period prior to emigration.

Of most value to many researchers is the photograph on the front of the visa packet. Attached to the visa application are vital records required by the Immigration Act of 1924. In most cases these include a certified copy of a birth certificate, health certificate, and police or "moral" certificate (the results of a

record check done by the authorities in the old country). Some visas include marriage certificates, military service records, affidavits of support, or correspondence. When the birth record is absent there is usually an affidavit explaining the absence of official or church records and offering the testimony of an individual in a position to know the circumstances of the immigrant's birth.

Index Search Issues

The most common problem in searching for Visa Files involves the immigrant's name. Many Visa Files relate to immigrants who did not naturalize and so there is no index cross-reference to an alias or Americanized name. As a result the file remains indexed under the name of the immigrant upon arrival (i.e., the old country name). Researchers who have found the passenger list or manifest record of an immigrant arriving after July 1, 1924, should always provide the name as it appears on that arrival record. All requesters should provide all possible name variations or spellings.

Record Request Issues

Traditionally, the only Visa File record retrieval problem occurred when the immigrant's case re-opened after 1975, the visa packet was consolidated into an A-File, and it was impossible to update the microfilmed index. Solving this problem involved performing a few additional steps.

The Genealogy Program may experience an additional problem with Visa Files if researchers try to submit Record Requests without a prior Index Search Request. As noted above, the agency assigned unique Visa File numbers after the immigrant arrived. Thus the Visa File number did not appear on the visa at any time while in the immigrant's possession. Rather, since issuance the visa bore a number assigned by the Department of State (DOS). The DOS visa number may also appear on a ship passenger manifest under the column heading "Immigration Visa Number." This is not the USCIS Visa File number, yet some researchers may mistakenly think the number on the passenger list is the number of the immigrant's Visa File.

Visa Files may include documents containing personal information about other persons (called "third parties") who may still be living, such as the immigrant's children, other family, or neighbors. For example, if the immigrant had minor children living at the time of immigration they will be listed on one page of the four-page application. A document containing third party personal information is not releasable outside the Freedom of Information (FOIA) process, so some records recieved from the Genealogy Program may have some information redacted.

Where do I find a Visa File number?

Visa File numbers are not available outside USCIS (see Record Request Issues, above). To identify a Visa File number submit a Genealogy Index Search Request on form G-1041.

As with any government inquiry made for genealogical purposes, patience is a virtue. The usual waiting time for responses to requests may be six months to a year or more. Because of increased security measures, all requests are examined in far more detail than prior to 9/11. Do not be surprised if you are contacted and required to submit more details before your request will be approved. One patron recently claimed that her request took almost two years of red tape before the information was finally approved for release. She also said the wait was worth it because the file on her grandfather was 200 pages in length. She was thankful that they were even willing to respond given the increasing security hassles. Examples of information that may be located using these files would include:

1. Original identity card or booklet (similar to a passport showing the country of origin)
2. Photographs
3. Fingerprints
4. Information on the month and year of embarkation and arrival in the United States
5. Statistics on height and weight
6. Home addresses of family members and relationships on both sides of the Atlantic
7. Names of parents and siblings
8. Any reports on the individual or family on file with law enforcement or governmental entities.

Genealogical Research Request Online

Website link for Genealogy Requests Online:
http://www.uscis.gov/history-and-genealogy/genealogy/making-request-online

Welcome to the new USCIS Genealogy online request system. Please take a moment to read the important information below before clicking the "Order Online Now" link at right.

If you prefer to order by mail, click the "Make a Genealogy Request by Postal Mail" link to the left.

How does it work?

When you click the "Order Online Now" link at right, you will enter your request data in a series of screen "forms" for uploading into our Genealogy request system. Once you have completed all the screens and verified the information is correct (or made the corrections), you will click directly to the Pay.Gov website to enter your credit card payment information. Once that transaction is complete you will return to the Genealogy system page, and to a printable receipt showing your new USCIS Genealogy Case number.

Important: If you are submitting an Index Search Request or Records Request without Case ID, do not close your browser after receiving your case number. Instead, click the "Next" button at the bottom of the page to go to the security information page. Your order is not complete until you submit a security question and answer. **If you do not submit security question information, you will not be able to use your Case ID to make a Records Request.**

Quick Tips

- If you know about your immigrant, but do not know their file number(s), choose to make a Search Request. *A separate index search request is required for each individual immigrant. Requests for related immigrants cannot be combined and you will only receive index search results for the subject of your request.*

- If you know about your immigrant and have the correct file number(s), choose to make a Record Request. You may have learned the file number from a previous Search Request, or from other research. If you have any doubt that the number is correct, request an index search.

- Which name, which spelling? Do not worry if you have more than one name or name spelling for your immigrant. When filling out the request you will first enter the name you think is correct, and later can add alternate spellings in the optional information section.

- Don't know the exact date of birth? Do not worry if you have only an approximate birth date (or multiple birthdates) for your immigrant. The online form asks for an exact date, then asks you if the date given is an estimate. If you can only provide an approximate year enter January 1 as the birthdate (01/01/) and check the "estimated" box. Later, in the "other biographical information" section, you can provide alternate birth dates.

- If you enter an estimated date of birth the system will alert you that proof of the immigrant's death may be necessary. If you know the date of birth is more than 100 years ago (for example, an estimated birth year of 1878) you will not have to provide any proof of death. If you estimate 1907 the system may accept your request without proof, but if we determine the immigrant was born less than 100 years ago you will be contacted and asked for proof of death before records or information can be released.

Detailed Instructions for submitting a Search Request Online

The step-by-step instructions below are for Index Search Requests, the most common request received by the Genealogy Program. All requesters can benefit from reading the instructions as much of the information pertains to both Search and Record requests.

Step 1: Begin your Index Search request

To begin your Index Search request, click the "Order Online Now" link on this or several other USCIS Genealogy Program webpages. On the first screen, choose the Index Search Request option by clicking the button next to the $20 fee listing. After reading the information about the fees and required supporting documents, click the "next" button at the bottom of the page.

Next, complete the Requestor Information page. Note that you are required to choose a method of contact: mail, telephone, or email. USCIS researchers may use this information to contact you in the event that they need additional information about your request. Providing a telephone number or email address allows our researchers to contact you promptly and may accelerate the completion of your request. Index search results will be mailed in a letter via postal mail to the address you enter.

Once you complete the requestor information, click "next."

Step 2: Enter your immigrant ancestor's information

Required Information: While the online form only requires you supply at least a surname, country of birth, and date of birth (actual or estimated), **you must provide the immigrant's first and last names**. If you know your immigrant's middle names, please supply it as well. In this section use the name(s) that you believe to be correct. You will have an opportunity to submit alternate names and spellings in the optional information section.

Important: You must complete the date of birth field for both actual and estimated dates of birth. For an estimated year of birth, use January 1st as the month and day of birth. (e.g.: 01/01/1905). If you have

conflicting dates of birth, enter the one you believe is most accurate. You can provide the alternate later when asked for "other biographical information."

Once you complete the required information, click "next."

* **If your ancestor's date of birth is less than 100 years ago** or if you supplied an estimated date of birth, you will see a page notifying you of the required proof of death. If you do not have any of the acceptable forms of proof, you may consider canceling your request now and beginning a new request when you have copies the necessary documents. If you have proof of death for your immigrant (or the date of birth is more than 100 years ago), click "next." At the end of the request process you will be provided with the opportunity to upload scanned copies of your documents, if necessary. The mailing address for paper copies is provided then, as well.

Additional Information: The next request pages allow you to provide additional information that may help our researchers locate your immigrant. Though it is not required, it is recommended that you supply as much of this information as possible. In many cases, our researchers can differentiate between immigrants with the same name only when additional information is provided.

If you know the exact date of your immigrant's arrival (listed on the immigrant's arrival record or a ship's passenger manifest), provide it in the date boxes. If you know the approximate date of arrival, select the appropriate date range from the drop down menu.

If you know any of your immigrant's places of residence (often available through census records) and the approximate periods of residence, list them in the boxes provided.

Click "next" to move to the second page of additional information.

Because immigrants often changed their names alternate names and spellings may help our researchers locate your ancestor. If you know any of these alternate names, please provide them. USCIS researchers will search only the alternate names that you provide and cannot return records for names other than those provided.

The names of family members (children, spouse, sometimes parents) may help our researchers locate your immigrant. If you know any of these names, please provide them. Family member names are used only to help locate the subject of your request. You will not receive index search results for family members unless you submit a separate index search request for each individual.

Finally, other biographical information may help our researchers find your immigrant. For example, providing the dates of military service may point our researchers toward a record of military naturalization. If you know the date of naturalization, military service, marriage, or other important information, please type in the box provided. You may also use this space to explain or provide additional information about conflicting dates of birth.

After completing the additional information, click "next."

Step 3: Submitting your request

You now have the opportunity to review your request. If any of the information listed is incorrect, you may use the "previous" button to go back and correct the errors. If the information is correct and you wish to proceed with your order, click "submit." Once you click the submit button you will be unable to change your request (you will not, however, be charged at this point and you will still have the option to cancel the request).

After reviewing the Fee information, select your payment type (online or by mail) and click "submit payment." ***Be sure to only "submit" once to avoid duplicate charges.***

* If you choose to pay by credit card you will be redirected to the pay.go site to enter your payment information. Once your payment information is submitted, you will automatically be returned to the Web Request Page to complete your transaction.

After you have been returned to the Web Request Page, you will find yourself on a page titled "Genealogy Search Request Submitted." Do not Close your browser. Instead, review the information and click the "Next" button at the bottom of the page. If you are making an Index Search Request or Records Request without Case ID, you will be prompted to supply a security question and answer. After submitting your security information you will again see your Case ID.

Step 4 : Upload supporting documents (if required)

If the immigrant's date of birth is less than 100 years before today's date you must upload documentary proof of death with this online request. To do so, you will need to 1) identify an acceptable document, 2) save that document in an electronic form, and 3) upload the document when prompted to do so. Remember, if you cannot upload an electronic document, you can choose to mail supporting documents and the system will provide mailing instructions.

1. Examples of acceptable documentary proof of death include: Death certificate (uncertified copy); Printed obituaries, funeral programs, or photographs of gravestones; Bible, church, or other religious records; Records relating to the payment of death benefits; U.S. Social Security Death Index records (individual records only, not lists); and/or other documents demonstrating that the immigrant subject of the request is deceased.

2. **Electronic file format.** Documents may be uploaded as image files (.jpg, .gif, .PDF, etc.). Or, if you are sending more than one document, paste the images into a Word document, save it, and upload the Word file.

3. **Upload.** When prompted to upload your file, clicking the "Browse . . ." button should open your familiar "open file . . ." window. Locate the document on your computer, select the document, and click "open," "upload," or "OK" as indicated.

When sending supporting documents by mail, please ***do not include original records*** because such documents will not be returned.

Genealogy Case Status Inquiry

Genealogy requests submitted online are acknowledged by the receipt generated when a request is successfully submitted. The receipt includes the case identification number as well as the date of submission.

Genealogy requests submitted by postal mail are acknowledged by a letter notifying the requester of the case identification number and the receipt date.

At the bottom of the USCIS Genealogy Program home page you will find a message indicating the receipt date of requests currently being processed. This message is updated weekly. Requesters may check the web site at any time to see our progress toward the receipt date of their request.

Questions regarding the receipt of a particular request or urgent status inquiries may be sent via email to Genealogy.USCIS@dhs.gov, or by leaving a message at our toll-free voice mail number (866) 259-2349

Make a Genealogy Request by Postal Mail

Please read the Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) and the form instructions before sending any money.

The Forms: Genealogy requests may be submitted via postal mail using Forms G-1041 and G-1041A, available for downloading on the right or on "Forms" portion of the USCIS website. The instructions for each form are also available. The mailing address is included in the form instructions.

- **Update**: Form 1041, Genealogy Index Search Request, currently asks if you would prefer to receive your search results via email or postal mail. To date all requests have been sent by postal mail. The Genealogy Program will offer email responses at a future date.

- **Update:** Form 1041A, Genealogy Records Request, currently asks if you would prefer to receive digital images of records by email or printed on paper and sent by postal mail. Files will not be delivered via email, but can be mailed as PDF files on a CD. Requesters who check the "email" box for this question on Form 1041A will receive their files as PDF files on a CD via postal mail.

Payment information: Please be sure to submit payment with your request form. Genealogy requests will not be processed until payment is received. **Payment may be in the form of a cashier's check or money order. Personal checks will not be accepted. Do not send cash.** More information about payment is available in the downloadable form instructions.

Do not mail requests to our Washington, DC, address. All forms and fees must be mailed to the P.O. Box address found on the instructions to forms G-1041 and G-1041A. Any forms and fees sent to Washington are sent on to Chicago for proper processing. Sending requests to Washington delays your case. Only correspondence and questions should be sent to the Genealogy Program in Washington. The links for both forms are listed below:

Form G-1041: Genealogy Index Search Request
Purpose of Form :

Use G-1041 to request a search of USCIS historical indices. To obtain copies of USCIS historical records, use Form G-1041A, Genealogy Records Request. Requests for searches of USCIS historical indices are used to determine whether any USCIS records exist on the subject and, if such records exist, to capture the file number and/or other identifier of each record.
http://www.uscis.gov/files/form/g-1041.pdf
http://www.uscis.gov/files/form/g-1041instr.pdf

Where to File :

Mail completed forms with payment to:

USCIS Genealogy Program
PO Box 805925
Chicago, IL 60680-4120

Filing Fee :
$20
Special Instructions :

Note on payment: Payment must be submitted with this form to request a genealogy index search. Payment may be in the form of a cashier's check or money order. Personal checks will not be accepted, and they will be returned to you. If the form is submitted from outside the United States, remittance may be made with a bank international money order or foreign draft drawn in U.S. dollars and payable through a U.S. bank. Make all payments in U.S. currency to the Department of Homeland Security. Do not send cash with your form.

Form G1041-A: Genealogy Records Request
Purpose of Form :
Use Form G-1041A to obtain copies of USCIS historical records.
http://www.uscis.gov/files/form/g-1041a.pdf
http://www.uscis.gov/files/form/g-1041ainstr.pdf

Where to File :

Mail your request to:

USCIS Genealogy Program
PO Box 805925
Chicago, IL 60680-4120

Filing Fee :
The fee for a copy from microfilm is $20 per request. The fee for a copy of a hard copy file is $35 per request.
Special Instructions :

Note on fees: You must submit the appropriate fee with this form for a genealogy records request. The fee for a copy from microfilm is $20 per request. The fee for a copy of a hard copy file is $35

per request. Send payment with your request form. Payment may be in the form of a cashier's check or money order. Personal checks will not be accepted, and they will be returned to you. If the form is submitted from outside the United States, remittance may be made with a bank international money order or foreign draft drawn in U.S. dollars and payable through a U.S. bank. Make all payments payable in U.S. currency to the Department of Homeland Security. Do not send cash with your form. If the file number provided does not match the immigrant named on this form, and there is no previous Genealogy Index Search case identification number provided, we will not refund any fee.

Important: If the immigrant for whom you are seeking information was born less than 100 years prior to the date of your request, **you must attach documentary proof of death to your request form**. Do not attach original records because they will not be returned to you. Information about acceptable forms of proof of death is available in the downloadable form instructions.

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