

General Immigration and Naturalization Records Timeline, 1820-1954

Records at both the National Archives and USCIS

19 th C.		Early					Middle				Late	
1820	1882	1893	1895	1903	1906	1917	1924	1929	1940	1944	1947	1954
1. Customs Lists NARA RG 36 Microfilm		2. Immigration Lists - NARA RG 85 Microfilm									3. Imm. Lists	
		4. Canada Border Records – NARA RG 85 Microfilm										
		5. Mexico Border Records – NARA RG 85 Microfilm										
		6. Aliens Detained, BSI Records – NARA RG 85 Microfilm, Textual, Misc.										
		7. Immigration Correspondence (Appeals) NARA (DC) RG 85, Entry 7, 9 Textual Records										
							A. Visa Files					
							B. Registry Files					
Records at NARA							C. AR-2					
Records at USCIS											D. A-Files	
		8. Court Naturalization Records (Courthouses & NARA) – Regional NARAs RG 21										
		E. Naturalization Certificate Files										
		E. Odd Certificate Files										
		9. Bureau of Natz Correspondence NARA (DC) RG 85, Entry 26 – Textual Records										

Immigration and Naturalization Records at National Archives (NARA)

1. **Customs Lists, 1820-1891.** Ship passenger manifests collected by the US Customs Service. Now included in NARA RG 36. Virtually all published on microfilm.
2. **Immigration Lists, 1892-1954.** Ship passenger manifests collected by the US Immigration Service. Now included in NARA RG 85. Majority of microfilm published and publishing continues.
3. **Immigration Lists, 1954-1982.** Ship and airplane manifests collected by INS, mostly on abbreviated forms with minimal information. Most records are of crew. Largely unpublished microfilm.
4. **Canada Border Records, 1895-1954.** A system of sea and land port records on microfilm now within NARA RG 85. Dates vary for different ports. Largest components of the system are published and publishing continues.
5. **Mexico Border Records, 1903-1954.** Alien and citizen arrival manifests at US-Mexico border ports. Dates vary for different ports. Much of the microfilm is published and publishing continues.
6. **Aliens Detained, BSI Records, +/- 1893-1944.** Included in this category are the Lists of Aliens Detained and Lists of Aliens Held for Special Inquiry preserved on New York passenger list microfilm, and the Philadelphia Board of Special Inquiry records published on NARA microfilm M1500. Other scattered BSI and detention records survive in various regional NARAs, but the majority of detention and BSI records were destroyed long ago.
7. **Immigration Correspondence, 1882-1957** (Subject and Case Correspondence of the Immigration and Naturalization Service). At NARA in Washington, DC, RG 85, entries 7, 8, 9, and related registers and indices. In addition to policy and administrative files, this series contains case correspondence files for aliens and citizens who appealed BSI decisions or had other immigration or nationality issues/problems. No name index available for public search, but a subject index is available as NARA microfilm T458.
8. **Court Naturalization Records, 1790-1992.** Court records of naturalization activity, today housed in courthouses, archives, libraries, historical societies, etc. Federal court records are found with the court or in NARA RG 21.
9. **Bureau of Naturalization Correspondence Files, 1906-1944.** NARA RG 85, Entry 26. In addition to policy and administrative files, this series contains case correspondence for aliens and citizens with nationality questions or concerns. A name index to these files is *forthcoming* as NARA microfilm A3388.

Immigration and Naturalization Records at US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS)

- A. **Visa Files, 1924-1944.** 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 five 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. In cases where the immigrant naturalized or the immigrant's case reopened after April 1, 1944, the Visa File may have been transferred out of this historical Service record series to a C-File or an A-File.
- B. **Registry Files, 1929-1944.** Original 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. Registry Files typically contain an application form describing the immigrant's arrival in the United States before 1924, and detailing their U.S. residence and employment history. Most files also include documents supporting the immigrant's claims regarding arrival and residence (i.e., proofs of residence, receipts, employment records, etc.). In cases where the immigrant naturalized or the immigrant's case reopened after April 1, 1944, the Registry File may have been transferred out of this historical Service record series to a C-File or an A-File.
- C. **Alien Registration Forms (AR-2), 1940-1944.** 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. 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 U.S.; date of first arrival in U.S.; number of years in U.S.; 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 U.S.; arrest record, including date, place, and disposition of each arrest; whether or not affiliated with a foreign government; signature, and; fingerprint.
- D. **Alien Registration Files (A-Files), 1944 to present.** Individual alien case files (A-files) became the official file for all immigration records created or consolidated since 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).
- E. **Naturalization Certificate Files (C-Files), 1906-1956, and Odd Certificate Files, 1929-1956.** 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. The majority of C-Files exist only on microfilm. Standard C-Files 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 include photographs.