



The National Archives at San Francisco

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BASIC RESEARCH STEPS FOR SAN FRANCISCO AND HONOLULU IMMIGRATION CASE FILES

Our Regional Office holds more than 200,000 investigative case files of several types created by Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) District Offices in San Francisco and Honolulu. Most concern Asian immigrants and Asian Americans who were investigated under various immigration laws including the “Chinese Exclusion Acts,” 1882-1943 and later, the Immigration Act of 1924. Case files were created when individuals traveled to or from the U.S through the ports of San Francisco and Honolulu.

If the steps below do not produce results or if you have any other questions, you may wish to make an appointment to discuss your research with a NARA staff. Same-day appointments are generally not available. Please contact us either by telephone or email (email is best).

All

1. **Check the immigration case files at** <https://www.archives.gov/research/catalog>. Results may include both case files and certificate of identify. Name searches in the NARA online catalog may also result in A-files. See last section for A-files.
2. **Check our immigration case file index** at: <http://casefiles.berkeley.edu>
3. For immigrants who were **naturalized between September 27, 1906 and March 31, 1956**, there may be a “Certificate File” (C-File). Inquire with the USCIS Genealogy Program - <http://www.uscis.gov/genealogy/>.

San Francisco

1. **Check our microfilm copy of the INS-San Francisco card index to immigration case files dated 1884-1979. The film is in cabinet 36, drawers 1 to 3.** It is arranged alphabetically by name. Each index card reproduced on the microfilm includes the INS **case file or A-file number in the upper right hand corner**. Most index cards also list the date of arrival or departure and the birth date or age at arrival. This is the most complete index we currently have. Unfortunately the INS-San Francisco District lost 50 of the original 376 rolls of

microfilm before the National Archives could acquire them. The INS destroyed the index cards immediately after they were microfilmed.

2. Check Immigration and Naturalization Service name-searchable **passenger arrival lists** on
 - **Ancestry.com** – individual subscription required but free to access at any NARA facility or at many public libraries.
 - **FamilySearch.org** – free to access

For arrivals before 1913, the four or five digit ship manifest number might be written in the upper right hand corner of the right page of the passenger list or might be written somewhere else on the page. i.e. 9228, 11346, etc. The ticket number usually appears next to the passenger name.

For arrivals from 1913 to 1943,

- The first part of the case file number is the five digit ship manifest number in the upper right hand corner of the right page of the passenger list. i.e. 22311.
- The second part is the page number at the top of the left sheet and the line number immediately to the left of the person listed. i.e. page 30, line 22 becomes 30-22.
- These two parts combined give the arrival case file number: i.e., 23111/30-22.

For arrivals from 1944 to 1955, a 1300 file may exist. Inquire with a NARA staff.

For arrivals after 1956, see last section for A-files.

3. **Additional online sources from NARA partners.** There may be additional digitized and indexed microfilmed and original records related to Chinese immigrants. These include:
 - Boards of Special Inquiry at the San Francisco Immigration Office, 1899-1941 [various]
 - Partnership Lists of Chinese Firms in San Francisco, California, 1893-1943

For a complete list, visit <https://www.archives.gov/digitization/digitized-by-partners>.

Honolulu

1. Check Immigration and Naturalization Service name-searchable **passenger arrival lists** on
 - **Ancestry.com** – individual subscription required but free to access at any NARA facility or at many public libraries.
 - **FamilySearch.org** – free to access

Immigration case file numbers for HI arrivals could appear in the “Immigration Visa Number” column – though not always. Examples of case file numbers include “4382/3750”, “4382/3724”, and “4382/3520”.

2. **For arrivals between 1903 and 1954**, check the Hawaii Index to immigration case files (paper copy in one binder in our research room).
3. **Additional online sources other than NARA.** There may be additional digitized and indexed microfilmed and original records related to Chinese immigrants. These include:
 - **Hawaii**, Passenger Lists, 1843-1898 – digitized from Collector General of Customs. Records of Passenger Arrivals and Departures. Series 82. Hawaii State Archives, Honolulu, Hawaii. – *Ancestry.com*
 - **Hawaii**, Certificates of Identification for Chinese Arrivals, 1895-1898 – digitized from Board of Immigration (Department of the Interior). Certificates of Identification. Series 516. 18 volumes. Hawaii State Archives, Honolulu, Hawaii – *Ancestry.com*

Alien Case Files (A-Files)

Created by the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) beginning in 1944, Alien Case Files (“A-Files”) contain all records of any immigrant or alien **whose INS case was active after April 1, 1944, or who became a naturalized citizen after March 31, 1956.**

On June 3, 2009, the National Archives and Records Administration and United States Citizenship and Immigration Services signed an agreement to make the A-Files a permanent series of records. A-Files will be transferred in five-year blocks to National Archives custody 100 years after the alien's year of birth.

The National Archives at San Francisco and the National Archives at Kansas City currently maintain over 350,000 individual A-Files for persons born in 1910 and before. Because of strong interest and advocacy for the A-Files by local research communities and their congressional representatives, the National Archives at San Francisco will maintain A-Files controlled by INS district offices located in San Francisco, Honolulu, Reno, and Guam. Researchers seeking individuals who may have lived in these areas should check the holdings of both the San Francisco and Kansas City facilities.

A rich source of biographical information, A-Files may include visas, photographs, affidavits, and correspondence leading up to an alien's naturalization, permanent residency, or deportation. Some A-Files contain records consolidated from older immigration case file series – such as Chinese Exclusion Act era case files – currently open for public research at the National Archives.

For information about how the A-Files, including how to search for and request copies of individual A-Files, please visit <http://www.archives.gov/research/immigration/aliens/>.

Does my immigrant ancestor have an A-File?

The A-Files do not document every immigrant to the United States. Use this chart to determine who may have an A-File or other type of record created by the former Immigration and Naturalization Service. (Adapted from chart created by Marian Smith, Chief Historian, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services.)

The U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) Genealogy Program can be accessed online at <http://www.uscis.gov/genealogy/>

The immigrant....	
Died before August 1, 1940	Will not have an A-File nor an Alien Registration Number. See above for instructions on immigration to SF and HI.
Became a naturalized citizen between September 27, 1906 and August 1, 1940	Will not have an A-File nor an Alien Registration Number. However, you should inquire with the USCIS Genealogy Program regarding a possible “Certificate File” (C-File) .
Became a naturalized citizen between August 1, 1940 and March 31, 1956	Will likely not have an A-File. However, you should inquire with the USCIS Genealogy Program regarding a possible “Certificate File” (C-File) or 1940 Alien Registration Form.
Immigrated to the United States after April 1, 1944	Will have an A-File. Check National Archives holdings if born in 1910 or prior. Otherwise, inquire with the USCIS Genealogy Program.
Naturalized on or after March 31, 1956	Will have an A-File. Check National Archives holdings if born in 1910 or prior. Otherwise, inquire with the USCIS Genealogy Program.
Registered in the United States as an alien in 1940 but never came back to the Immigration and Naturalization Service for any reason	Was likely assigned an Alien Registration Number but will not have an A-File. You can obtain a copy of their 1940 Alien Registration Form from the USCIS Genealogy Program.
Registered in the United States as an alien in 1940 and came back to the Immigration and Naturalization Service for any reason (other than naturalization) after 1944	Will have an A-File. Check National Archives holdings if born in 1910 or prior. Otherwise, inquire with the USCIS Genealogy Program.