



Naturalization Records at NARA

Slide 2-3 – Background

- Naturalization is the process by which an alien becomes an American citizen.
- Naturalization is a voluntary act; naturalization is not required.
- Prior to September 27, 1906, any "court of record" (municipal, county, state, or federal) could grant United States citizenship. Often petitioners went to the court most geographically convenient for them. Generally, NARA does not have naturalization records created in state or local courts.
- Beginning September 27, 1906, United States naturalization law imposed a fee structure that encouraged the transfer of naturalization to federal courts. It took time for the lower courts to let go of the practice, so researchers may need to look at lower courts if NARA does not maintain a record of naturalization from the early-mid 20th century.
- A few indexes and records have been donated to NARA from counties, states, and local courts. Researchers should contact the NARA facility (<https://www.archives.gov/locations>) serving the state in which the petitioner resided to determine if records from lower courts are available. In certain cases county court naturalization records maintained by NARA are available as microfilm publications (<https://www.archives.gov/research/immigration/naturalization/microfilm>).

Slide 4 – Naturalization Records Web Page

- <https://www.archives.gov/research/immigration/naturalization>

Slide 5 – Naturalization Process

Slide 6 – Overview

- In general, naturalization was a two-step process* that took a minimum of five years. [*Exceptions can include cases of derivative citizenship, processes for minor aliens 1824-1906, and special consideration for veterans.]
- After residing in the United States for two years, an alien could file a "declaration of intention" ("first papers") to become a citizen. After three additional years, the alien could "petition for naturalization" ("second papers"). After the petition was granted, a certificate of citizenship was issued to the new citizen.
- These steps did not have to take place in the same court.

Slide 7 – Declaration of Intention (AKA "First Papers")

- Declares an individual's intention to file a formal petition to become a citizen.
- 1929 Statute required aliens to receive a Certificate of Arrival that verified legal immigration.

- Beginning in 1952 declarations were no longer required, though some were still submitted.

Slide 8 – Petition for Naturalization (AKA “Final Papers” or “Second Papers”)

- Final step toward becoming a citizen.
- Filed a minimum of 2 years after the Declaration of Intention.
- Immigrants petitioned before a judge and were either granted or denied citizenship.

Slide 9 – Certificate of Naturalization (AKA “Certificate of Citizenship”)

- Issued by the court until October 1991 when the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) took over responsibility for naturalization proceedings.
- Given to the new citizen as proof of citizenship; used to prove eligibility to vote, apply for a US passport, and to prove eligibility for other rights of citizenship.

Slide 10 – Special Cases

Slide 11 – Processes for Minor Aliens 1824-1906

- May 26, 1824 (4 Stat. 69) - Immigrants who arrived in the United States before they were 21 years old, had lived in the United States for at least five years before their 23rd birthday, and whose fathers were not already naturalized could file for naturalization independent of their families. They were allowed to file their Declaration and Petition at the same time.

Slide 12 – Special Considerations for Veterans

- July 17, 1862 (12 Stat. 597) – Aliens who received honorable discharges from the United States Army were not required to file declarations and could become citizens after one year residency.
- July 26, 1894 (28 Stat. 124) – Aliens who received honorable discharges from the United States Navy and Marines were not required to file declarations.
- May 9, 1918 (40 Stat. 542) – Aliens currently in the United States military were permitted to file for citizenship after serving three years without any residency requirement.

Slides 13-14 – Changes in Women’s Citizenship Law

- February 10, 1855 (10 Stat. 604) - Alien women married to United States citizens considered to be citizens.
- March 2, 1907 (34 Stat. 1228) - American-born women who married foreign-born men took the citizenship status of their husbands. Once the marital relationship was terminated, the women could regain their American citizenship (no mechanism for regaining citizenship was identified).

- September 22, 1922 (42 Stat. 1021) - Allowed alien wives of United States citizens to file for citizenship after one year of residency; stopped removals of citizenship status from native-born American women who had married aliens not eligible for United States citizenship.
- June 25, 1936 (49 Stat. 1917) - Allowed American women who had lost their citizenship because they married aliens to regain citizenship by taking oaths of allegiance to the United States.
- "Any woman who is now or may hereafter be married . . ." Women and Naturalization, ca. 1802–1940: <https://www.archives.gov/publications/prologue/1998/summer/women-and-naturalization-1.html>
- "Any woman who is now or may hereafter be married . . ." Women and Naturalization, ca. 1802-1940, Part 2: <https://www.archives.gov/publications/prologue/1998/summer/women-and-naturalization-2.html>

Slide 15 – Naturalization Research

Slide 16 – Naturalization Records at NARA

- If a naturalization took place in a Federal court, naturalization indexes, declarations of intention (with any accompanying certificates of arrival), and petitions for naturalization will usually be in the NARA facility serving the state in which the federal court (<https://www.archives.gov/research/court-records>) is located.
- No central index exists.

Slide 17 – States Covered at NARA for Naturalization in Federal Courts

NARA Office	States Covered for Naturalization in Federal Courts*
<i>Atlanta</i>	Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee
<i>Boston</i>	Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, Vermont
<i>Chicago</i>	Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio, Wisconsin
<i>Denver</i>	Colorado, Montana, New Mexico
<i>Fort Worth</i>	Arkansas, Louisiana, Oklahoma, Texas
<i>Kansas City</i>	Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota
<i>New York City</i>	New Jersey, New York, Puerto Rico
<i>Philadelphia</i>	Delaware, Maryland, Pennsylvania, Virginia, West Virginia
<i>Riverside</i>	Arizona, Southern California, Clark County Nevada
<i>San Francisco</i>	Northern and Central California, Hawaii
<i>Seattle</i>	Alaska, Idaho, Oregon, Washington
<i>Washington, DC</i>	District of Columbia

Slide 18 – Requests

- To ensure a successful request with NARA researchers should include:
 - name of petitioner (including known variants)
 - date of birth
 - approximate date of entry to the United States
 - approximate date of naturalization
 - where the individual was residing at the time of naturalization (city/county/state)
 - country of origin

Slide 19 – Certificates of Citizenship at NARA?

- In most cases, NARA **will not** have a copy of the certificate of citizenship.
- Two copies of the certificate were created – one given to the petitioner as proof of citizenship, and, after September 26, 1906, one forwarded to the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS).
- Certificates of citizenship were issued by the federal courts until October 1991 when naturalization became an administrative function under the INS.

Slide 20 – NARA vs. USCIS

- All INS records are now overseen by the US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS).
- USCIS maintains duplicate copies of court records (including the certificate of citizenship) created September 27, 1906-March 31, 1956, within Certificate Files (C-Files). Beginning April 1, 1956, INS began filing all naturalization records in a subject's Alien File (A-File) (<https://www.archives.gov/research/immigration/aliens>).
- C-Files and certain A-Files can be requested through the USCIS Genealogy Program (<https://www.uscis.gov/genealogy>).
- If a naturalized citizen is seeking their own documentation, they can place a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request to USCIS to obtain a copy of their A-File and/or request a replacement certificate of citizenship from USCIS.

Slide 21 – Naturalization Records in A-Files at NARA

- Beginning April 1, 1956, INS filing systems changed. Instead of consolidating naturalization records into C-Files, all documentation of naturalization proceedings was filed into an Alien File (A-File).
- USCIS began transferring A-Files to the custody of NARA in 2010. Files are eligible for transfer based on 100+ Year of Birth (YOB). NARA does not yet maintain all A-Files meeting that criteria.
- All A-Files currently maintained by NARA are indexed in the National Archives Catalog (<https://catalog.nara.gov>).
- Original records at NARA:
 - National Archives at Kansas City (afiles.kansascity@nara.gov)

- National Archives at San Francisco (sanbruno.archives@nara.gov)
 **SF has *some* of the A-Files from INS district offices in San Francisco, Honolulu, Reno, and Guam.

Slide 22 – A-Files Online Catalog Search Result

A-Files Online Catalog Search Result

Individual's Name	National Archives Identifier	Alien Registration Number & Accession/Box Info						
Alien Case File for Regina Pilus This file consists of an alien case file for Regina Pilus. Date of birth is listed as 01/01/1895. Country is listed as Russia. Alias name is listed as Regina Petraszka. National Archives Identifier: 5325346 Local Identifier: A5272291/085-10-0128/Box 44 Container Identifier: 44 Creator: Department of Justice, Immigration and Naturalization Service, 6/14/1940-3/1/2003								
Scope & Content This file consists of an alien case file for Regina Pilus. Date of birth is listed as 01/01/1895. Country is listed as Russia. Alias name is listed as Regina Petraszka.								
Variant Control Numbers								
<table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 60%;">ARC Identifier:</td> <td>5325346</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Agency-Assigned Identifier:</td> <td>A5272291 <small>This is the assigned Alien Registration Number.</small></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Search Identifier:</td> <td>sIAFile Pilus, Regina</td> </tr> </table>			ARC Identifier:	5325346	Agency-Assigned Identifier:	A5272291 <small>This is the assigned Alien Registration Number.</small>	Search Identifier:	sIAFile Pilus, Regina
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Search Identifier:	sIAFile Pilus, Regina							
Archived Copies								
<table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 30%;">Copy 1:</td> <td>Preservation-Reproduction-Reference</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Contact(s):</td> <td>National Archives at Kansas City (RM-KC[A]), 400 West Pershing Road Kansas City, MO 64108 Phone: 816-268-8000 Fax: 816-268-9038 Email: Atileskansascity@nara.gov</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Copy 1 Media Information:</td> <td>Specific Media Type: Paper Container ID: 44 Physical Restriction Note: Because these records are stored offsite, researchers must request the records 48 hours in advance.</td> </tr> </table>			Copy 1:	Preservation-Reproduction-Reference	Contact(s):	National Archives at Kansas City (RM-KC[A]), 400 West Pershing Road Kansas City, MO 64108 Phone: 816-268-8000 Fax: 816-268-9038 Email: Atileskansascity@nara.gov	Copy 1 Media Information:	Specific Media Type: Paper Container ID: 44 Physical Restriction Note: Because these records are stored offsite, researchers must request the records 48 hours in advance.
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Note: Always read the "Scope & Content" note to learn more about the subject of the file.

Location of Record →

Slide 23 – Naturalization Index Cards

- In some cases NARA has card indexes compiled through Works Progress Administration projects that facilitated verification of "old law" naturalizations that took place before Federal regulation of the naturalization process began on September 27, 1906.
- There are also some card indexes documenting naturalization proceedings through 1991.
- Understanding how to read the cards can be very helpful to know if a record will be at NARA or if you need to look for documents from lower courts.
- Directory of Courts Having Jurisdiction in Naturalization Proceedings (M2033) (<https://catalog.archives.gov/id/55287624>)
- Ancestry and FamilySearch targeted these records for digitization, so many appear on our partners' sites and are starting to appear in the National Archives Catalog as well.

Slide 24 – Sample Card: NAID 148424793 (<https://catalog.archives.gov/id/148424793>)

Family name ACHAETZ (ACHATZ)	Given name or names XAVER
Address 2462 SO. 16 ST. OMAHA NEBRASKA DOUGLAS CO.	
Certificate no. (or vol. and page)	Title and location of court
Country of birth or allegiance GERMANY HAMBURG	When born (or age) NOVEMBER 30, 1882
Date and port of arrival in U. S. S.S. GRAF WALDESSER APRIL 3, 1907 NEW YORK	Date of naturalization
Names and addresses of witnesses C. G. ELSASSER, OMAHA, NEBRASKA CHAS. A. RIES, OMAHA, NEBRASKA	
U. S. DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE, Immigration and Naturalization Service. Form N-35 (Old 1-1P) 18-17302	

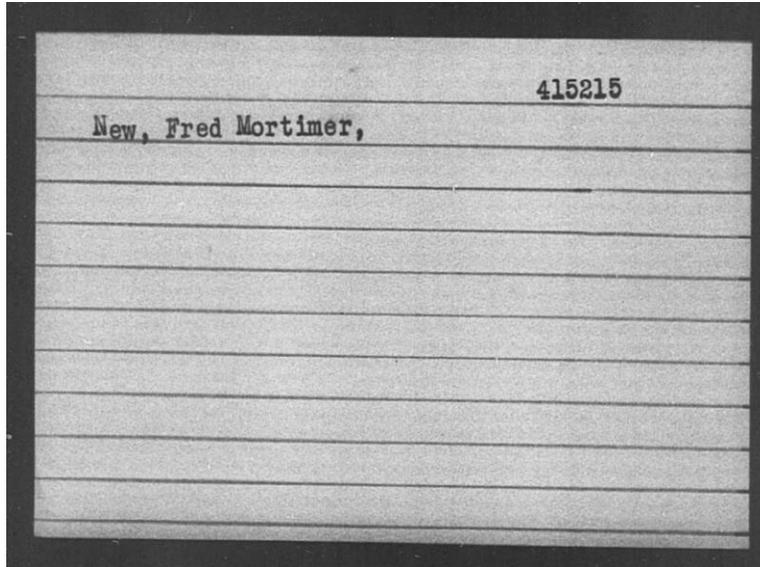
Slide 25 – INS Court Designation

- On the prior card we saw: 2063-P-2070
- Looking at the digitized copy of M2033 in the catalog we see that 2063 correlates with the Douglas County District Court.
- NARA does not have the correlating naturalization record, so you would need to go to the local resource (in this case, the Douglas County Historical Society) in order to obtain copies of the records.

Slide 26 – Sample Card: NAID 73401523 (<https://catalog.archives.gov/id/73401523>)

No. 6603544
Name NUSSBAUM, Herta New
residing at 84 09 Talbot St. Kew Gds., N.Y.
Age 45 years. Date of order of admission June 5, 1945
Date certificate issued June 5, 1945 by the
U. S. District Court at Brooklyn, New York
Petition No. 426757
Alien Registration No. Herta New Nussbaum
A. R. # 1213571
(Complete and true signature of holder)

Slide 27 – Sample Card: NAID 62703846 (<https://catalog.archives.gov/id/62703846>)



Slide 28 – Records of Name Changes

- Name changes can be reflected on Petitions for Naturalization and Certificates of Naturalization. Sometimes there are notations on naturalization index cards as well.
- Modern name change records can be their own series of records transferred from the courts, but these do not exist for every court at NARA.
Example: USDC Topeka, KS – [Petitions for Name Changes](#), 1992-2014
- It is very rare to find any information about **why** a name change occurred (or **why** an alias was used). Notations indicating name variants do appear in court naturalization records and A-Files, but normally no explanation behind it is included.

Slide 29 – Records of Children

- Records of children are dependent on laws in place at the time and their specific scenario (born in US, born abroad, adopted internationally, etc).
- Children deriving citizenship from their parent normally do not have their own Petitions for Naturalization. They may still have an INS record (A-File or C-File), but will normally not appear outside their parent's Petition in court records.
- There are cases where a parent is petitioning for citizenship on behalf of their minor child. There is a slightly different version of the Petition for Naturalization for these cases, but they are filed with the standard Petition forms in our court holdings at NARA. The parent's name is recorded at the top of the form, and the child's name appears at the bottom.
*If you are unsure how a minor child received citizenship, it's helpful to include parent names in the request so we can check all possibilities in our search.
- Regardless of scenario, you should include ALL known name variants in requests to NARA.

Slides 30-31 – Dual Citizenship Seekers

- NARA **CAN** provide certified copies of records in our holdings and can issue negative search letters (as appropriate).
- NARA **CANNOT** issue certifications of non-existence, apostille records, change/correct records, or provide a certified negative search letter.
- <https://www.archives.gov/research/immigration/dual-citizenship-faq>

Slide 32 – Contact Us

- **E-mail:** kansascity.archives@nara.gov
- **Postal mail:**
National Archives at Kansas City
400 W. Pershing Rd.
Kansas City, MO 64108
- **Phone:** (816) 268-8000