



National Archives and Records Administration

8601 Adelphi Road
College Park, Maryland 20740-6001

VISA RECORDS

Except for a brief time during the American Civil War (1861-1865), alien visitors did not require visaed passports in order to enter the United States. The practice of requiring all aliens to obtain visas from U.S. officials abroad before departure for the United States began in 1917 as a war measure during World War I. That procedure was continued under an act of May 22, 1918, amended in 1921. U.S. consuls were directed to refuse visas to aliens whose entrance might threaten the public safety and were required to warn applicants for visas who were liable to be legally excluded from the United States upon their arrival at ports of entry. Under the Immigration Act of 1924, which continued the quota system for immigrants to the United States established in 1921, consuls were responsible for denying visas to applicants inadmissible under that system. Visa activities in the Department have been handled by an organization responsible for that function since 1918. That organization and its procedures have gone through many changes over the years.

Certain file categories in the Department of State central files were assigned for use by the visa organization and the records were kept separate from the main series of the Department's central files. Recordkeeping for files relating to visa matters now in the National Archives falls into three main periods of time:

- 1910 through 1949.

- A. Central Decimal File category "150" (with sub-divisions) dealt with "Immigration to the United States" and file category "151" (with sub-divisions) covered "Immigration of Chinese to the United States."

- B. Records relating to "Regulations governing residence, trade, and travel" to the United States were filed in file category "811.111" and records relating to individuals were filed under "811.111 [name]."

- 1950 to 1962. Central Decimal File categories "150" through "165" dealt with broad subject of "Entry of aliens into, residence of aliens in, the United States" and records relating to individuals were filed under "150 [name]."

- Beginning in 1963. The Department began using an alpha-numeric filing scheme for its central files. Under the new filing system, records relating to "Visas" were filed in the file category "V." There were sub-divisions, such as "V-1" for "General policy. Plans. Coordination" and "V-12" for "Entry."

- ◆Refer to the filing manuals for each time period for more detail on the organization of the records described above.

While all records on visa and immigration matters were supposed to be filed in the files maintained by the office responsible for visa matters, a very small

amount of documentation is found among the main series of the Department of State central files for the 1910-1963 period.

I. Finding Aids

Lists of Papers ("Purport Lists") Regarding Immigration, 1910-1939. RG 59 Entry A1-701. Boxes 1-15. Lists of Lists of documents for RG 59 Entry A1-702.

Lists of Papers ("Purport Lists") in the General Visa Correspondence, 1914-1940. RG 59 Entry A1-703. Boxes 1-22. Lists of documents from the period 1914-1940 found in RG 59 Entry A1-704.

Lists of Papers ("Purport Lists") of Procedural Correspondence Concerning Visas, 1914-1931. RG 59 Entry A1-706. Boxes 1-5. Box 1: Dec 1914-Sept 1918; Box 2: Sept 1918-July 1919; Box 3: July 1919-October 1920; Box 4: October 1920-May 1924; Box 5: May 1924-October 1930. Lists of documents for RG 59 Entry A1-707.

II. Records Relating to Individuals

Visa Case Files, 1914-1940. File category "811.111 [Name]" arranged in the following three chronological segments: 1914-1923 Boxes 1-445; 1924-1932 Boxes 446-906; and 1933-1940 Boxes 907-1736. Entry A1-705. **This is the only period for which case files on individuals exist.** Furthermore, in the 1914-23 and 1924-32 blocks, only precedent cases, files containing policy documentation, and cases on significant individuals are preserved. See Section V: Records of Other Agencies, for information about alternative sources of documentation on individuals.

III. Policy and Procedural Records

The bulk of the preserved visa-related records consist of policy and procedural documentation arranged according to the file numbers assigned during the period of time each filing system described above was used.

File No.	Dates	Boxes	Entry No.
1914-1949			
150 - 151.997	1910-1939	1-291	A1-702A
150.1- 150.9469 [Confidential File]	1910-1939	292-294	A1-702A
150.01 [Name] - 150.946 [Name]	1914-1924	1-3	A1-710
150 Barred Zones-151.997	1940-1945	1-103	A1-702B
150-151.10 Students	1945-1949	1-46	A1-702C
811.111	1914-1931	1-106	A1-707
811.111 Visas Granted	1914-1924	1-6	A1-709

811.111 Visas Refused	1914-1924	1-3	A1-710
800.111 - 811B.55	1914-1940	1-246	A1-704A
811.111 - 811.11181 [Confidential File]	1914-1940	247	A1-704A
811.111 - 811G.111	1940-45	1-236	A1-704A
811.111 - 811G.5544K	1945-1949	1-154	A1-704A
1950-1962			
150s and 160s	1950-54		Erroneously destroyed.
150 - 165.98	1955-59	502-572	A1-702D*
150 - 165.98	1960-62	1-51	A1-702E*
1963-1970			
V - V 31	1963-1964	1-47	A1-704B*
V - V 31	1965-1970	48-152	A1-704B*

*These records are not generally available for researcher use at the present time.

IV. Other Department of State Records

Among other visa-related records are:

Lists of Visas Refused and Granted at Foreign Service Posts in Europe, 1917-1919. RG 59 Entry A1-708. 1 box. Lists from the consulate general in Paris, the legation in the Netherlands, the embassy in Spain, and the legation in Switzerland.

Petitions of the Jewish Peoples' Committee, 1938. RG 59 Entry A1-712. 1 box. A sampling of petitions urging passage of House Joint Resolution 637 providing for the admission of refugees into the United States.

Visa Agent Designation Forms, 1941-1945. RG 59 Entry A1-3005. 3 boxes.

More information on most of the records described above, as well as others, is in Inventory 15: Inventory of the General Records of the Department of State, RG 59.

V. Records of Other Agencies

Immigrant visas, both quota and nonquota (and supporting documentation), issued by the Department of State to aliens at U.S. embassies, legations, and consulates overseas are surrendered to U.S. immigration officials upon admission to the United States. The immigrant visas and associated documentation accumulated by the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) between July 1, 1924, and March 31, 1944, were maintained by the central office in Washington, DC in the *Visa Files*. Beginning April 1, 1944, the Visa Files series was closed and all new immigrant visas were filed in the *Alien Files* ("A-Files"). An immigrant's Visa File may have been removed from the

Visa Files series and placed in a consolidated A-File or Certificate File ("C-File") if his or her case re-opened after April 1, 1944. Visa Files and C-Files are preserved, but remain in the custody of U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). For more information on the different types of files and how to request access to them, please see that agency's "History and Genealogy" website located at: <https://www.uscis.gov/historyandgenealogy>. USCIS has begun to transfer A-Files to the National Archives for preservation. For more detail, go to: <https://www.archives.gov/research/immigration/aliens>.

Research Services
July 2017
December 2019 Revised