



## Frequently asked questions about court case files in NARA's Philadelphia Records Center

**Why are court case files in NARA's Records Center?** NARA provides safe, secure, and economical records storage services for the courts. The regional Records Center in Philadelphia stores about 1 billion files from Federal agencies and courts. Among these files are closed court case files from Federal courts in Delaware, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Virginia, and West Virginia.

**Why must I get case file, accession, and location numbers from the court before I contact NARA?** NARA cannot provide you with information about the existence or location of a file, because the files belong to the courts. Only the courts maintain lists of case file names, which are then indexed to file numbers and locations. In cooperation with the courts, NARA offers public access services to provide faster retrieval. Without this service, you would have to request a case from the court and then wait for the court to retrieve the file from our Records Center.

**What causes delays in servicing my order?** Delays are caused by: lack of complete case identifying information (obtained from the court); errors in the case identifying information; failure to include a phone number where we can contact you; lack of payment; credit card disapproval; illegible handwriting; and failure to include the fax number for fax orders.

**How does NARA retrieve case files for public use?** After you get ALL THE REQUIRED INFORMATION from a court, NARA staff knows where to find the file among the miles of record storage shelving in our warehouse. If any case information is missing or erroneous, we will probably not locate the file. If necessary, two different people will search for a file. Sometimes we also call the court for help.

**What happens if you can't find my file?** If we cannot find your file, we call you and you must re-check all the information with the court.

**How long does it take to retrieve, copy and send a file?** After we receive a request, NARA staff log it in, verify payment, retrieve the file, and either copy and mail it or fax it to you **within three business days**.

**What is the fastest way to get a copy?** The fastest way to obtain a file is for you to call or fax your request and for NARA to fax the file copy back to you. Of course, for a fax transaction, you must pay by credit card and we must verify your payment. If you don't have a fax, an alternative way to speed up the process is for you to pay in advance for overnight delivery of your copied file or to pick up your copies.

**Can I call NARA to check on my order?** First, please do **not** call us to confirm that we received your fax transmission. Your fax machine can do that! A "confirming" call causes delays for everyone, including you. Our best advice is to wait three work days after we receive your fax order and seven days after we receive your mail order ... you will have your copy by then! If you are in a rush and absolutely cannot wait, call us **with your case file number** about four work hours after you fax your order. If you mailed an order, you need to allow at least 3 days for NARA to receive your order. The number is 215-305-2000.

**What if my file is more than 70 pages?** We will call you to explain your options. One option is an additional payment of \$.50 per page for each page over 70 pages. Alternatively, staff might suggest eliminating some pages.

**Should I order a package or a complete file?** You need to discuss your options with your attorney or the party who asked you for the case file information. NARA provides packages of selected documents that suffice for some reasons, but we cannot make the decision for you!

**What hours are you open?** We are open 8:00 am to 4:30 pm, Monday through Friday except Federal holidays. Often a staff person is available earlier in the morning. No files are retrieved after 3:30 pm. We also have voice mail for after-hours messages.

**How do I get to the Records Center and where can I park?** We are about 3 miles from I-95 (Woodhaven Road, Route 63 exit) or the Pennsylvania Turnpike (exit 28, Route 1 South) in northeast Philadelphia. Call us or visit our web site for directions. Parking is free. There is limited, local public transportation via SEPTA buses.

**What can I expect when I visit the Records Center?** Before you visit, we suggest that you confirm that we retrieved your file. Upon arrival, you will check in with security, be issued a visitor's badge, and be escorted to the research room. You may bring only paper and pencil, laptop computers, or portable audio recording devices into the research room. All other items must be placed in a locker or returned to your car. You can order copies made while you wait, if you pay in advance by cash, check, or credit card. No copies will be made after 4:15 pm. Eating, drinking and smoking are not permitted in the research room. There is a snack room with vending machines in the building.