

Department of State Records for Genealogical Research

While most records of the Department of State relate in some way to the planning and implementation of American foreign policy, the files include documentation relating to individuals. Some series of records particularly lend themselves to genealogical study. Those records are found primarily in the following two record groups.

- [Record Group 59: General Records of the Department of State](#)
- [Record Group 84: Records of Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State](#)

Record Group 59: General Records of the Department of State

There are files in this record group relating both to individual persons and to those who served as officials in government service.

I. Individuals

Name Cards. For each segment of the Department's central file there are cards, which serve as a finding aid for communications to, from, or about private persons or organizations. Researchers cannot rely on the name cards to locate all documents relating to or mentioning a given individual. While the name index is an important tool and can assist with identifying documents and files of interest, the coverage is limited. Name cards do not exist for every name mentioned in the records, or there may only be one card leading to a file with many documents. To locate all pertinent documentation, one must determine the file designation most likely to contain records of interest and then make a document-by-document search. While this can be laborious, it will result in the most comprehensive results. The cards are divided into segments matching those of the records to which they relate:

- 1906-10: Numerical and Minor File
- 1910-29: Central Decimal File
- 1930-39: Central Decimal File
- 1940-44: Central Decimal File
- 1945-49: Central Decimal File
- 1950-54: Central Decimal File
- 1955-59: Central Decimal File
- 1960-January 1963: Central Decimal File
- February-December 1963: Subject-Numeric File
- 1964-66: Subject-Numeric File
- 1967-69: Subject-Numeric File
- 1970-73: Subject-Numeric File

The Name Cards for 1910-1959 are available for research. The Name Cards for 1960-1973 are classified and are not available to researchers. NARA reference staff can perform very limited searches in the classified index for researchers.

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Passport Applications. The Department of State is responsible for issuing passports. Except for brief periods during the Civil War (August 19, 1861 to March 17, 1862) and World War I (1915-1922), U.S. citizens did not require passports for travel overseas until 1941. Since then, American citizens traveling overseas have been required to hold passports. The National Archives holds passport applications only to 1925. Passport applications after that date remain in the custody of the Department of State.

The following series of passport applications in this record group have been digitized and are available [at all NARA facilities](#).

- RG 59-A1-508 PASSPORT APPLICATIONS, 1795-1905
- RG 59-A1-515 EMERGENCY PASSPORT APPLICATIONS, 1877-1907
- RG 59-A1-534 PASSPORT APPLICATIONS, 1906-1925
- RG 59-A1-534.1 APPLICATIONS FOR EXTENTION OR AMENDMENT, 1918-1925
- RG 59-A1-535 PASSPORT APPLICATIONS-SPECIAL SERIES, 1914-1925
- RG 59-A1-536 SPECIAL PASSPORT APLPLICATIONS, 1914-1925
- RG 59-A1-537 SPECIAL DIPLOMATIC PASSPORT APPLICATIONS, 1916-1925
- RG 59-A1-538 PASSPORT APPLICATIONS - DECLARANT, 1907-1911 AND 1914-1920
- RG 59-A1-539 PASSPORT APPLICATIONS - INSULAR, 1913-1925
- RG 59-A1-540 PASSPORT APPLICATIONS - CHINESE, 1915-1925
- RG 59-A1-542 PASSPORT APPLICATION - U.S. TERRITORIES AND POSSESSIONS, 1907-1925
- RG 59-A1-543 MISCELLANEOUS EMERGENCY PASSPORT APPLICATIONS (PASSPORT ISSUED ABROAD), 1907-1923
- RG 59-A1-544 EMERGENCY PASSPORT APPLICATIONS (PASSPORTS ISSUED ABROAD), 1906-1925
- RG 59-A1-545 APPLICATIONS OF WIVES OF MEMBERS OF THE AMERICAN EXPEDITIONARY FORCES IN EUROPE, 1919-1920
- RG 59-A1-546 APPLICATIONS FOR CERTIFICATES OF IDENTIFICATION - GERMANY, 1920-1921

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Visa Applications

The Department of State issues visas to foreigners traveling to the United States. Except for a brief time during the Civil War (1861-1865), before World War I, alien visitors did not require visas 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, and has continued since then.

There is one series of Visa Case Files covering the period 1914-1940. It is divided into three chronological segments: 1914-1923, 1924-1932, and 1933-1940, each arranged alphabetically by name.

Birth Reports

Americans giving birth overseas often reported that event to the local American diplomatic or consular establishment nearby, which would complete the requisite form and send it to the Department of State. The National Archives holds a separate collection of those reports for the 1910-49 period. Earlier reports might be among the Department's central files; later reports remain in the custody of the Department of State.

The 1910-49 reports have been digitized and are available [at all NARA facilities](#).

Marriage Reports

Americans marrying overseas often reported that event to the local American diplomatic or consular establishment nearby, which would complete the requisite form and send it to the Department of State. The National Archives holds a separate collection of those reports for the 1910-49 period. Earlier reports might be among the Department's central files; later reports remain in the custody of the Department of State.

The 1910-49 reports have been digitized and are available [at all NARA facilities](#).

Death Notices and Reports

The notices include "Records of Death Notices of U.S. Citizens Abroad, 1835-1855" and "Notices of Deaths of U.S. Citizens Abroad, 1857-1922." From 1910 to January 1963, the Department filed the "Reports of Death of An American Citizen Abroad" in the appropriate file category in the Central Decimal File, depending on the place of death.

Beginning in 1963 the records were maintained separately in alphabetically-arranged files arranged in annual blocks. The National Archives has records dating through 1974.

The records have been digitized and are available [at all NARA facilities](#).

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II. Officials in Government Service

Some of the more important series of records containing information about persons who served in the government are described below. Please note that this list is not all-inclusive.

Letters of Application Recommendation for Public Office. The records are arranged in chronological periods by Presidential administration and thereunder alphabetically by name of applicant. The files contain applications and letters of recommendation for positions in the government, including diplomatic and consular service.

- George Washington Administration. In the [Manuscript Division of the Library of Congress](#).
- Microfilmed Records

The following records are available on National Archives Microfilm Publications as noted. Each publication is accompanied by a descriptive pamphlet listing the names of applicants.

- John Adams Administration, 1797-1801: [M406](#)
- Jefferson Administration, 1801-1809: [M418](#)
- Madison Administration, 1809-1817: [M438](#)
- Monroe Administration, 1817-1825: [M439](#)
- J.Q. Adams Administration, 1825-1829: [M531](#)
- Jackson Administration, 1829-1836: [M639](#)
- Van Buren, W. Harrison, Tyler Administrations, 1836-1845: [M687](#)
- Polk, Taylor, Fillmore Administrations, 1845-1853: [M873](#)
- Pierce, Buchanan Administrations, 1853-1861: [M967](#)
- Lincoln, A. Johns Administrations, 1861-1869: [M650](#)
- Grant Administration, 1869-1877: [M968](#)
- Records not on Microfilm

The following records are available for use at the National Archives at College Park. [Lists of names for each administration are available in our online catalog.](#)

- Hayes, Garfield, Arthur Administrations, 1877-1885
- Cleveland, B. Harrison Administrations, 1885-1893
- Cleveland Administration, 1893-1897
- McKinley Administration, 1897-1901

Applications and Recommendations to the Consular and Diplomatic Services, 1901-24. Arranged alphabetically by name of applicant. The files may contain applications, letters of recommendation, appointment papers, and related documentation.

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Card Records of Appointments Made, 1776-1968. Beginning in 1789, the Secretary of State prepared the civil commissions of U.S. officials appointed by the President, affixed the Great Seal to such documents, and kept records for such appointments. For the period 1776 to 1968, there are record cards for each person appointed and commissioned. The cards indicate the date(s) of appointment and type of position. The cards are arranged in the following time periods: 1776-1933, 1934-1953, 1954-1960, and 1961-1968.

Service Record Cards, 1890-1939. Cards with information on persons who served in the Diplomatic, Consular, or Foreign Service or in subordinate positions. These cards may contain biographical information such as date and place of birth, education, and notes on service.

Lists of U.S. Diplomatic Officers by Country, 1789-1939. Lists, arranged alphabetically by name of country in which a diplomatic post was located, thereunder by class of officer, and thereunder chronologically by date of appointment. Information on individuals includes title or grade, nationality, place of birth, residence when appointed, and date of appointment. Occasionally, the date of death, retirement, termination of service, or transfer to another post is noted.

Lists of U.S. Diplomatic Officers by Post, 1789-1939. Lists, arranged alphabetically by name of consular post, thereunder by class of officer, and thereunder chronologically by date of appointment. Information on individuals includes title or grade, nationality, place of birth, residence when appointed, and date of appointment. Occasionally, the date of death, retirement, termination of service, or transfer to another post is noted.

The Department's central files also contain documentation relating to individuals.

1789-1906: Despatches received by the Department of State from its diplomatic and consular officers abroad are arranged by country (diplomatic despatches) or city (consular despatches) and thereunder chronologically. Those reports, especially near the beginning or end of a person's service in an overseas position, sometimes include personal information about the officer or his subordinates. All of these records have been microfilmed.

1906-1910: The Numerical and Minor Files include documentation relating to the service of diplomatic and consular officials. References to the pertinent file(s) are found in the Card Index to the Numerical and Minor Files or on the first page of the Purport Lists for the "123" files described under the heading on the 1910-63 records.

1910-1963: Within the Central Decimal File, the file category "123" contains personnel-type documentation on individuals serving in the Foreign Service. The files for the earlier period are arranged according to a cutter file number made of a combination of letters and numbers (i.e. 123 St 41); later files are simply arranged alphabetically by name (i.e. 123 Stewart, Nathaniel B.). Other file categories may include documentation on personnel, too.

1963-1973: Within the Central Foreign Policy File, there are two basic files containing personnel-type documentation on individuals serving in the Foreign Service. The file PER [Name], arranged alphabetically, contains documentation relating to individuals and the file category PER [Post name] includes documentation on the personnel of a given post.

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Record Group 84: Records of Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State

Passport Applications. The records of some Foreign Service Posts for the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries include separate series of records consisting of copies of passport applications for passports issued at those posts.

For the period 1912-1948, passport applications were placed in File 130 (Citizenship of the U.S.) in post files. That file was not designated for preservation in the National Archives, but on rare occasions some records from that file were bound with other file categories designated for preservation and are thus in the National Archives. None of the post passport application files after 1948 are preserved.

Visa Applications. For the period 1912-1948, visa applications were placed in File 811.11 (Visas) in post files. That file was not designated for preservation in the National Archives, but on rare occasions some records from that file were bound with other file categories designated for preservation and are thus in the National Archives. None of the post visa application files after 1948 are preserved.

Birth Reports. For the period 1912-1948, birth reports were placed in File 131 (Children born to American parents temporarily residing abroad) in post files. That file was not designated for preservation in the National Archives, but on rare occasions some records from that file were bound with other file categories designated for preservation and are thus in the National Archives. None of the post birth report files after 1948 are preserved.

Marriage Reports. For the period 1912-1948, marriage reports were placed in File 132 (Marriage of American citizens abroad) in post files. That file was not designated for preservation in the National Archives, but on rare occasions some records from that file were bound with other file categories designated for preservation and are thus in the National Archives. None of the post marriage report files after 1948 are preserved.

Death Reports. For the period 1912-1948, documentation on deaths was placed in File 330 (Deaths and estates) in post files. None of the post death and estate files after 1948 are preserved.

Publications

The Official Register of the United States includes information on employees of the Department of State. This publication was first published in 1816 as the Register of Officials and Agents and published every other year thereafter until the 1920s. The inclusiveness and presentation of information changed over time.

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The Biographic Register published by the Department of State between 1860 and 1974 includes entries for all employees of the Department, both in headquarters and serving abroad. Entries include basic biographic information as well as details on assignments.

See also the Department of State website [Principal Officers of the Department of State and United States Chiefs of Mission](#). This website includes organizational, alphabetical, and chronological listings of persons who served in various positions in the Department of State and overseas.

Official Personnel Files

[Official Personnel Files for Department of State and Foreign Service employees whose service ended before 1952 are located in the National Archives at St. Louis.](#)

[Official Personnel Files for Department of State and Foreign Service employees whose service ended after 1951 are located in the National Personnel Records Center in St. Louis.](#) Those records are in the legal custody of the Office of Personnel Management which controls access.