

Federal Penitentiary Records

Jake Ersland, Archivist
National Archives of Kansas City
(816) 268-8014 Jake.Ersland@nara.gov

The Paradox of the Inmate File?

The existence of an ancestor's inmate file means they were convicted of a federal crime. But it also means there is a possible treasure trove of family history available.

What Records are Available?:

- Inmate Case Files available from four Federal Penitentiaries:
 - Alcatraz Federal Penitentiary
 - Atlanta Federal Penitentiary
 - Leavenworth Federal Penitentiary
 - McNeil Island Federal Penitentiary

Alcatraz

- Comprehensive Case Files of Former Inmates Incarcerated at U.S. Penitentiary, Alcatraz, California, ca. 03/1975 - ca. 1988:
 - National Archives Identifier 622809
 - Bulk of series covers 1934-1963
 - Alcatraz held 1,576 inmates
 - Arranged Alphabetically
 - Index Available Online – Ancestry.com and archives.gov
 - National Archives at San Francisco

Atlanta

- Inmate Case Files, 1902 - 1921:
 - National Archives Identifier 607937
 - Covers only the earliest period of the Penitentiary's existence
 - Arranged Numerically
 - Index Available Online – Ancestry.com and archives.gov
 - National Archives at Atlanta

Leavenworth

- Inmate Case Files, 07/03/1895 - 06/06/1952:
 - National Archives Identifier 571125
 - Covers roughly the first half of the Penitentiary's existence
 - Arranged Numerically
 - Index Available Online – Ancestry.com and archives.gov
 - National Archives at Kansas City

McNeil Island:

- Prisoner Case Files, ca. 1875 - 1920:
 - National Archives Identifier 608858
 - Covers only the earliest part of the Penitentiary's existence
 - Arranged Numerically
 - Index Available Online – Ancestry.com
 - National Archives at Seattle

Locating An Inmate

- There are two sources online to search for inmates, **archives.gov** and **Ancestry.com**:
 - Archives.gov has an alphabetical index for Alcatraz, Atlanta, and Leavenworth
 - The date span coverage and information provided varies between location

<http://www.archives.gov/san-francisco/finding-aids/alcatraz-alpha.html>
<http://www.archives.gov/atlanta/finding-aids/atlanta-penitentiary/index.html>
<http://www.archives.gov/kansas-city/finding-aids/leavenworth-penitentiary/>

Privacy Act Restrictions

- File created at least 75 years ago
- Inmate is deceased and researcher can prove it through Social Security Death Index, Death Certificate, or obituary
- Third party information may be redacted

What is in the files?

- Inmate Mugshot
- Record Sheet
 - Inmate name and number
 - Crime and Sentence
 - Violations
- Personal Data Sheet
 - Place of birth
 - Names of parents
 - Permanent address
 - Religion
 - Education
 - Vices
 - And More
- Fingerprints
- Daily Work Record
- Hospital Record
- Physician's Exam of Inmate
- Correspondence Log
- Personal Correspondence
- Trusty Prisoner's Agreement
- Sentence of Court

Common Mistakes:

- State Penitentiaries
- US Disciplinary Barracks
- Soldiers' Home
- Related Camps

Contact Information:

- National Archives at Kansas City
400 West Pershing
Kansas City, MO 64108
- Kansascity.archives@nara.gov
- 816-268-8000

- National Archives at Atlanta
5780 Jonesboro Road
Morrow, GA 30260
- atlanta.archives@nara.gov
- 770-968-2100

- National Archives at San Francisco
1000 Commodore Drive
San Bruno, CA 94066-2350
- sanbruno.archives@nara.gov
- 650-238-3501

- National Archives at Seattle
6125 Sand Point Way NE
Seattle, WA 98115-7999
- seattle.archives@nara.gov
- 206-336-5115

Bureau of Prisons (BOP) - Contact Information:

- Bureau of Prisons
320 First St., NW
Washington, DC 20534
- 202-307-3198
- www.bop.gov
- webmaster@bop.gov