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THE A-FILES

Finding Your Immigrant Ancestors

By Elizabeth Burnes and Marisa Louie

During a 1940 radio public service announcement (PSA), Attorney General Robert Jackson said that "a year-end inventory of assets is a customary procedure of sound business."

He was referring to an "inventory" of all aliens living within the United States between April 27 and December 26, 1940.

"They are not American citizens but, with relatively few exceptions, these foreign-born among us are American assets—precious human assets," Jackson said. "At this critical period of our history an accounting of our assets is more than just sound practice; it is absolutely essential to our national defense."

The Alien Registration Act of 1940 required that all persons who were not citizens or nationals of the United States and were living within U.S. borders go to the local post office and register their alien status with the government. The registration process included filling out a questionnaire and having fingerprints taken. Certain exclusions applied for diplomats, employees of foreign governments, and children under the age of 14.

The Alien Registration Form (Form AR-2) contained 15 questions. These included questions about when and where the subject was born, when and where he or she entered the United States, and a physical description. There were also questions about employment, organization memberships, prior military service, and attempts to obtain naturalization in the United States. As the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) received the forms, it assigned an Alien Registration Number (for example, A1234567). The INS mailed an Alien Registration Receipt Card with this number to each registrant as proof of alien status.

A series of radio PSAs promoted registration. The PSAs said participation supported democracy and called on Americans to aid their alien neighbors in completing the registration process. A number of officials of foreign descent—German, Italian, Polish, etc.—spoke to audiences in their native tongues to ease fears about the registration restricting or violating their rights. To bolster support, newspapers across the country published numerous photographs of actors and musicians who were aliens completing the registration process.

Government officials expected around 3.6 million registrants, but final counts saw more than five million forms submitted. The completed AR-2 and the correlating A-Number became the foundation on which the Alien Files (A-Files) were later built.

Director Henry Koster and actress Anna Lee fill out the Alien Registration Form, 1940.

In 1944, INS recordkeeping moved from separate systems among field offices to a more standardized and structured approach. Beginning in April 1944, the new A-Files became the home for many of the Alien Registration Forms. The files, which were arranged by the A-Numbers assigned during the 1940 registration, tracked the interaction between an alien and the U.S. government leading up to naturalization, permanent residency, or deportation. The Alien Registration Form was often the first form transferred into the file.

Since 1944, more than 60 million A-Files have been created, but not every alien received a file in the early years of this filing system. Normally a file was opened when an action was taken by the alien to obtain a benefit from the federal government. For example, an alien might file a petition for an immigrant relative or a replacement for a lost alien registration card. A law enforcement case involving the alien could also prompt creation of a file.

Until April 1, 1956, the INS created Certificate Files (C-Files) to consolidate and manage documentation issued during the naturalization process. Any existing alien-related documentation (including the Alien Registration Form) was consolidated into a C-File. After April 1, 1956, the INS no longer created C-Files, and all documentation related to an alien was consolidated into an A-File. Today, the A-Files persist as the singular consolidated files for all records related to immigration, inspection, and naturalization processes.

Because of these changes to INS filing systems over time, an immigrant to the United States may have an A-File, a C-File, or another type of record created by INS. When determining whether the person you are seeking has an A-File, consider the following:

Over five million AR-2 forms were submitted and processed during the 1940 alien registration.

THE IMMIGRANT….	
Died before August 1, 1940	Will not have an A-File or an Alien Registration Number. Research other National Archives resources of genealogical interest.
Became a naturalized citizen between September 27, 1906, and August 1, 1940	Will not have an A-File or an Alien Registration Number. Inquire with the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service (USCIS) Genealogy Program regarding a possible Certificate File (C-File).
Became a naturalized citizen between August 1, 1940, and March 31, 1956	May or may not have an A-File. Also inquire with the USCIS Genealogy Program regarding a possible C-File or 1940 Alien Registration Form.
Immigrated to the United States after April 1, 1944	Will have an A-File. Check National Archives holdings if born in 1910 or earlier. Otherwise, inquire with the USCIS Genealogy Program.
Naturalized on or after March 31, 1956	Will have an A-File. Check National Archives holdings if born in 1910 or earlier. Otherwise, inquire with the USCIS Genealogy Program.
Registered in the United States as an alien in 1940 but never came back to the Immigration and Naturalization Service for any reason	Was likely assigned an Alien Registration Number but will not have an A-File. Check with the USCIS Genealogy Program for a copy of the 1940 Alien Registration Form.
Registered in the United States as an alien in 1940 and came back to the Immigration and Naturalization Service for any reason (other than naturalization) after 1944	Will have an A-File. Check National Archives holdings if born in 1910 or earlier. Otherwise, inquire with the USCIS Genealogy Program.

How Did the A-Files Come To the National Archives?

In the past, the National Archives sought to retain records that contained information that would help future historians understand "governmental organization, functions, policies, and activities."

"Personal data records" were not always considered "permanent." The National Archives formed the Personal Data Records Task Force in 1995 to examine several record series, including the A-Files, which had been previously scheduled as 75-year temporary records.

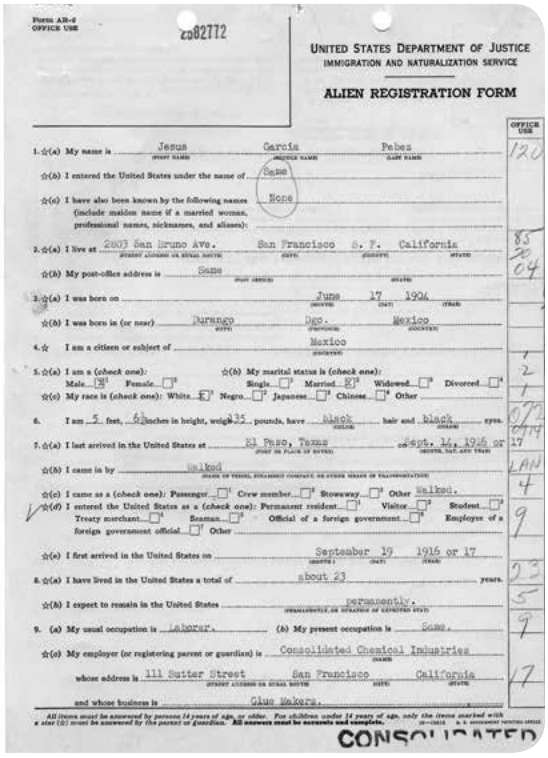
The A-Files were of particular importance to the Asian American community in San Francisco. The National Archives at San Francisco holds hundreds of thousands of case files relating to Chinese immigrants and Americans of Chinese descent, dating to the period of the Chinese Exclusion Acts.

Genealogists using these case files often found gaps because older immigration records may have been consolidated into an A-File. While these researchers were able to get copies of the A-Files through Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) and Privacy Act requests to the INS, they began to advocate for the permanent retention of the A-Files at the National Archives.

Also in the mid-1990s, the National Archives created a team to study storage limitations in all its facilities. A consortium of community and genealogical organizations, Save Our National Archives (SONA), first formed to "save" the regional facilities from consolidation or closure, turned its energy to preserving the A-Files.

Plans for a centralized records facility for the A-Files in Lee's Summit, Missouri, brought more calls to reevaluate the files as permanent records. SONA, with the backing of California Congressman Tom Lantos, requested that the A-Files maintained in the Federal Records Center in San Bruno, California, be withheld from centralization.

The INS and the Archives agreed to keep these A-Files in place for further study about


UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE
IMMIGRATION AND NATURALIZATION SERVICE

ALIEN REGISTRATION FORM

Jesus Garcia Perez, born June 17, 1905, in Mexico, registered as an alien in San Francisco, California, on October 14, 1940.

their research value and their relation to records already in the permanent holdings of the National Archives. These A-Files had been maintained by INS District Offices in San Francisco; Reno, Nevada; Honolulu; and Agana, Guam. A-Files from all other Federal Records Centers around the United States—approximately 350,000 cubic feet of material—were moved to the INS's National Records Center in Lee's Summit, Missouri, in 1998 and 1999.

For the next decade, the INS—which would become U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) in 2003—and the Archives continued to discuss how to retain the A-Files as permanent records. On June 3, 2009, representatives of the Archives and USCIS signed a new records schedule to officially designate all A-Files as permanent historical records. The records schedule now authorizes USCIS to send A-Files to the National Archives 100 years after an immigrant's year of birth.

The National Archives at Kansas City opened its holdings of eligible A-Files from the USCIS National Records Center in Lee's Summit on September 1, 2010. The National Archives at San Francisco opened its holdings of eligible A-Files—drawn from those originally retained in the San Bruno Federal Records Center—on May 22, 2012.

How Can I Use the A-Files For Genealogy Research?

A-Files can contain a wealth of genealogical data, including visas, photographs, applications, affidavits, and correspondence. Although the first files were created in 1944, documents and information may be much older. Documents may also refer to any final action related to the alien, which could be deportation, permanent resident status, or citizenship. The files can contain demographic information and documents that may not be found elsewhere, such as lists of places of residence, or baptismal certificates.

One person's file may contain only the Alien Registration Form and an Address Report Card, while another may have hundreds of pages, including applications, interview transcripts, letters of reference, handwritten notes, and family photographs. For a few lucky researchers, the A-Files can be a one-stop shop. For everyone, however, the files are another great piece of the puzzle. Genealogists can obtain basic biographical information and jumping-off points for filling in gaps in research they've already done, doing further research, and in some cases locating previously unavailable documentation.

An A-Files Advocate

"My dad passed away several years before I began to research my family history. He never talked about his immigration experience. When I searched for his records at the National Archives, his file was empty except for a note with his A number," says Jeanie Low of San Francisco, California.

In 1992, Low filed a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request for her parents' A-Files. "Just before Christmas, two large envelopes of photocopies arrived, each with over one hundred documents for each parent. They were bittersweet gifts from the government. My dad's A-File, dating from 1931–1974, contained a photo of him as a 14-year-old immigrant. . . . [T]he A-Files were the missing link to our family history."

With this personal knowledge of the A-Files, Low joined the efforts of Save Our National Archives (SONA) to secure permanent status for the records. "The A-Files reflect the ethnic diversity of the United States from the 20th century onwards," she says. "They are individual stories that show the political and economic conditions that influenced decisions to immigrate, and how people are impacted by changes in immigration policy."

Low shared with the authors materials from the Save Our National Archives (SONA) organizational files, which have been donated to the Ethnic Studies Library at the University of California, Berkeley.

Certificate of Naturalization

Finding a Certificate of Naturalization can be quite exciting for genealogists because it provides both proof of citizenship and a photograph of the individual. Only two copies of a Certificate of Naturalization ever existed – the copy presented to the petitioner when citizenship was granted, and a second copy maintained by the INS in either a C-File or A-File.

Certificates of Naturalization are a rare find outside of immigration files, but researchers should check among family papers. Finding the original copy of a certificate can help with the A-File search because the A-Number is sometimes printed on the certificate. As the naturalization process evolved, documentation of the process leading to the certificate changed. During the 1960s the Petition for Naturalization filed in the court became more abbreviated, so the extended Application for Naturalization—which is found in the A-File—becomes a more useful source for detailed biographical information.

Address Report Card

The Alien Registration Act of 1940 required all aliens to report their address on a regular schedule, and all changes of address were to be reported within five days to avoid penalties. The Address Report Card form changed throughout the 1940s and 1950s. At its most basic, the form gathered the individual's name, address, A-Number, and the date. Although the card is sometimes dismissed as less helpful than other documents in an A-File because the information recorded is limited in scope, it does allow researchers to obtain information about residences in non-census years.

Immigrant Visa and Alien Registration

The Immigrant Visa and Alien Registration combined the registration and visa procedures into a single component and replaced the Alien Registration Form used during the 1940 registration. It records much of the same information but gathers a significant amount of additional content, including details of family members (parents, children), prior residences and travel, and prior employment. The attachments to this form often draw the strongest reaction from genealogists. Attachments most frequently consist of a birth certificate, marriage certificate, and a police report from the country of origin. Occasionally, baptismal and death certificates appear, and sometimes certificates for parents, spouses, and children. This form and its attachments can be a treasure, but it appears in only a small percentage of A-Files.

How Do the A-Files Relate To Existing National Archives Holdings?

The Chinese Exclusion Act–era immigration case files (Record Group 85) pre-date the A-Files. These case files, which document the arrival and travels of persons of Chinese descent, may contain references to A-Files in the form of an INS charge-out slip or an annotated file jacket. Researchers should note the Alien Registration Number (A-Number) and use this to search National Archives A-Files holdings.

The Petition for Naturalization for someone who became a citizen after March 31, 1956, can be used to search for an A-File. Petitions may be found in the records of the U.S. District Courts (Record Group 21) or in the records of local county or state courts.

What Resources are Available Outside the National Archives?

If you discover that the National Archives does not have the A-File you are seeking, you can continue your search by contacting U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services through its Genealogy Program. The USCIS holds all active and inactive A-Files that have not yet been transferred to the National Archives.

In addition, the USCIS has a number of other file types useful for genealogy: Certificate Files (C-Files) from September 27, 1906, to April 1, 1956; Alien Registration Forms from August 1, 1940, to March 31, 1944; Visa files from July 1, 1924, to March 31, 1944; Alien Files (A-Files) numbered below 8 million (A8000000) and documents therein dated prior to May 1, 1951; and Registry Files from March 2, 1929, to March 31, 1944.


THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

TO BE FORWARDED TO IMMIGRATION AND NATURALIZATION SERVICE

CERTIFICATE OF NATURALIZATION

No. 11762094

Petition No. 609216

DUPLICATE

Alien Registration No. A35 030 111

Personal description of holder as of date of naturalization: Date of birth March 27, 1904 sex male complexion fair color of eyes brown color of hair grey height 5 feet 9 inches, weight 165 pounds, visible distinctive marks none Marital status married Country of former nationality Romania

I certify that the description above given is true, and that the photograph affixed hereto is a likeness of me.

Florea Dragan

(Complete and true signature of holder)

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
NORTHERN DISTRICT OF ILLINOIS } ss:

Be it known, that at a term of the District Court of the United States held pursuant to law at Chicago on SEP 17 1984 the Court having found that

FLOREA DRAGAN

then residing at 1344 S. Home Ave., Berwyn, Illinois intends to reside permanently in the United States (when so required by the Naturalization laws of the United States) had in all other respects complied with the applicable provisions of such naturalization laws, and was entitled to be admitted to citizenship, thereupon ordered that such person be and (s)he was admitted as a citizen of the United States of America.

In testimony whereof the seal of the court is hereunto affixed this SEP 17 1984 day of eighty-four in the year of our Lord nineteen hundred and

Seal

H. STUART CUNNINGHAM
Clerk of the U.S. District Court

By Laurel T. Ryan Deputy Clerk

IT IS PUNISHABLE BY U. S. LAW TO COPY, PRINT OR PHOTOGRAPH THIS CERTIFICATE.

DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

Florea Dragan, born March 27, 1904, in Romania, was naturalized September 17, 1984, at the U.S. District Court in Chicago, Illinois.

Piecing Together the Puzzle: A Holocaust Survivor's A-File

Researchers sometimes have the "more is more" mindset as they track down documentation on their ancestors, but there are occasions where a single document can provide amazing insights. The file of Moische Slodovnik (A6316522) is a prime example.

Moische's great-niece, French journalist Annie Anas, had been researching her family history for about 15 years before she learned of his A-File. Growing up, Annie had learned that her grandparents died in the Auschwitz concentration camp and believed that the whole extended family met a similar fate. In 1973, Annie's family learned by chance that Moische and two of his four children had successfully escaped the ghetto in Radun, Poland, after hearing that the Nazis planned to liquidate the ghetto on May 10, 1942.

Annie was fortunate enough to have the opportunity to meet Moische's children, and during the visit she learned that Moische had traveled into the United States following World War II. This fact would come into play many years later when Annie began researching her genealogy and ran into difficulties tracking down information about her family, specifically her great-grandmother's maiden name.

After extensive research, finding records of Moische's immigration to the United States seemed like the only possibility to locate the family name. Her searches had produced very little about Moische until she came across an entry for his A-File in the Archival Research Catalog.

The six pages of Moische's file included an Application for Immigration Visa, on which Moische listed his parents, Yehuda Slodovnik and Yahka Goldberg. Success! Annie now knew her great-grandmother's name and had a list of prior residences.

Born May 10, 1898, in Radun, Poland, Moische had spent his life until World War II in his hometown. He then moved to the ghetto at Radun for a year, fled to hide in the woods of Poland for two years, and eventually spent time in Berlin, Germany, and in a displaced persons camp at Eschwege, Germany, until National Refugee Service, Inc. paid his passage to the United States. Annie had no idea how Moische had survived or what became of him at the end of the war.

"I was very excited to receive copies of the file," Annie said. "I wanted to get your answer very quickly because I supposed it was the last chance to get the family information I had been seeking for so many years. Since most of my family died in the Shoah, it is not easy work. Learning my great grandmother's name, finding out about Moische's life, and obtaining his photograph are all very important for me because there are not many testimonies of what happened during the Shoah in little shtetles."

Though Moische lived only one year in the United States before he passed away, his A-File remains, holding clues to the struggles he and his family faced during the Holocaust and providing new leads for family historians

Form No. 255
Foreign Service
(Revised June 1945)

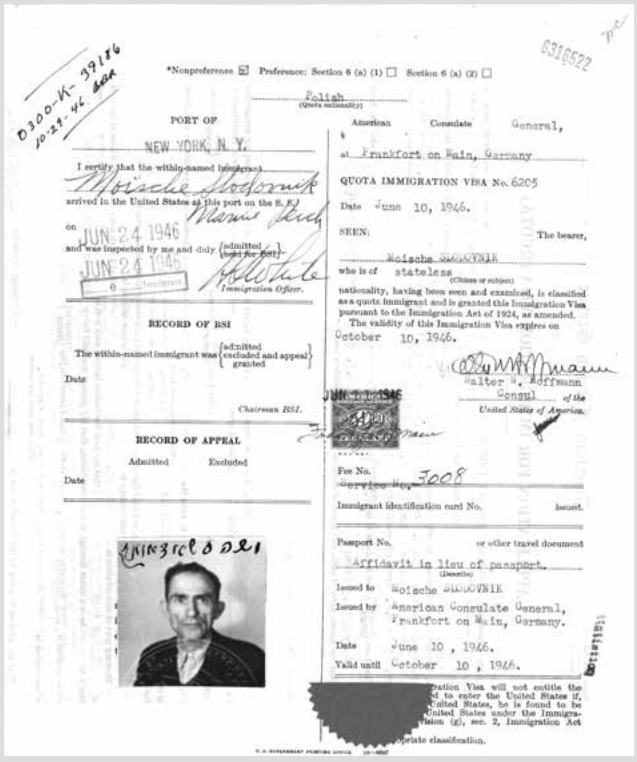
American Foreign Service

No. 6205

AT Frankfort on Main, Germany

APPLICATION FOR IMMIGRATION VISA (QUOTA)

I, the undersigned APPLICANT FOR AN IMMIGRATION VISA, being duly sworn, state that my full
Moische SLODOVNIK ; that I am 48 years of age, of the m
Polish race; that I was born on the 10th day of May 1898
at Radun, Poland ; that since reaching the age of 14 years I have resi
places, during the periods stated, to wit: Lived in Radun, Poland, from 1912 to 1941. From 194
in Ghetto at Radun, Poland. From May 1942 to July 1944 hid in the woods of Poland
1944 to February 1945 in Radun, Poland. From March 1945 to July 1945 in Berlin, G
July 1945 in D.P. camp at Eschwege, Germany.



A6316522

D300-K-39186
10-21-46 dsa

*Nonpreference ☑ Preference: Section 6 (a) (1) ☐ Section 6 (a) (2) ☐

Polish
(Quota nationality)

PORT OF NEW YORK, N. Y.

I certify that the within-named immigrant

Moische Slodovnik

arrived in the United States at this port on the S.S.

on JUN 24 1946

and was inspected by me and duly admitted / excluded for entry

Immigration Officer.

RECORD OF BSI

The within-named immigrant was admitted / excluded and appeal granted

Date

Chairman BSI.

RECORD OF APPEAL

Admitted Excluded

Date

American Consulate General,
at Frankfort on Main, Germany

QUOTA IMMIGRATION VISA No. 6205

Date June 10, 1946.

SEEN: The bearer,

Moische SLODOVNIK

who is of stateless
(Citizen or subject)

nationality, having been seen and examined, is classified as a quota immigrant and is granted this Immigration Visa pursuant to the Immigration Act of 1924, as amended.

The validity of this Immigration Visa expires on October 10, 1946.

Walter H. Hoffmann
Consul of the United States of America.

Fee No. 5008

Immigrant identification card No. Issued.

Passport No. or other travel document
(Describe)
Affidavit in lieu of passport.

Issued to Moische SLODOVNIK

Issued by American Consulate General, Frankfort on Main, Germany.

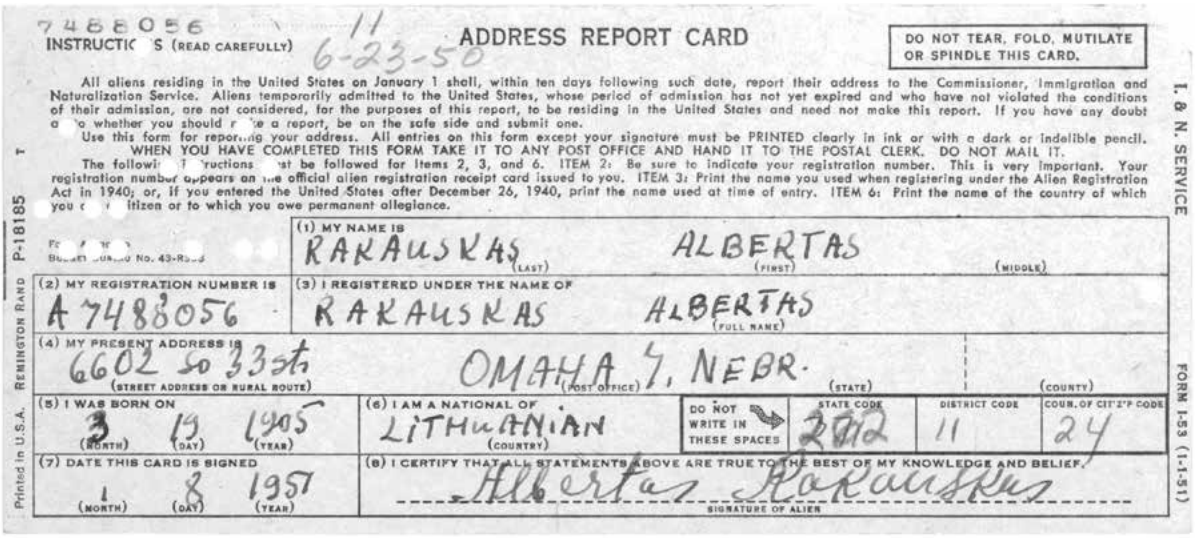
Date June 10, 1946.

Valid until October 10, 1946.

...ation Visa will not entitle the ...d to enter the United States if, ... United States, he is found to be ... United States under the Immigra... ...sion (g), sec. 2, Immigration Act ...

...opriate classification.

Moische Slodovnik's A-file reveals that he escaped the ghetto in Radun, Poland, during World War II, hid in the Polish forests, and managed to come to the United States in June 1946.



7488056 11 6-23-50

INSTRUCTIONS (READ CAREFULLY) ADDRESS REPORT CARD

DO NOT TEAR, FOLD, MUTILATE OR SPINDLE THIS CARD.

All aliens residing in the United States on January 1 shall, within ten days following such date, report their address to the Commissioner, Immigration and Naturalization Service. Aliens temporarily admitted to the United States, whose period of admission has not yet expired and who have not violated the conditions of their admission, are not considered, for the purposes of this report, to be residing in the United States and need not make this report. If you have any doubt as to whether you should make a report, be on the safe side and submit one.

Use this form for reporting your address. All entries on this form except your signature must be PRINTED clearly in ink or with a dark or indelible pencil.

WHEN YOU HAVE COMPLETED THIS FORM TAKE IT TO ANY POST OFFICE AND HAND IT TO THE POSTAL CLERK. DO NOT MAIL IT.

The following instructions must be followed for Items 2, 3, and 6. ITEM 2: Be sure to indicate your registration number. This is very important. Your registration number appears on the official alien registration receipt card issued to you. ITEM 3: Print the name you used when registering under the Alien Registration Act in 1940; or, if you entered the United States after December 26, 1940, print the name used at time of entry. ITEM 6: Print the name of the country of which you are a citizen or to which you owe permanent allegiance.

(1) MY NAME IS: RAKAUSKAS (LAST) ALBERTAS (FIRST) (MIDDLE)

(2) MY REGISTRATION NUMBER IS: A 7488056

(3) I REGISTERED UNDER THE NAME OF: RAKAUSKAS ALBERTAS (FULL NAME)

(4) MY PRESENT ADDRESS IS: 6602 So 33th (STREET ADDRESS OR RURAL ROUTE) OMAHA 7, NEBR. (POST OFFICE) (STATE) (COUNTY)

(5) I WAS BORN ON: 3 (MONTH) 19 (DAY) 1905 (YEAR)

(6) I AM A NATIONAL OF: LITHUANIAN (COUNTRY)

DO NOT WRITE IN THESE SPACES: STATE CODE 202 DISTRICT CODE 11 COUN. OF CIT'P CODE 24

(7) DATE THIS CARD IS SIGNED: 1 (MONTH) 8 (DAY) 1957 (YEAR)

(8) I CERTIFY THAT ALL STATEMENTS ABOVE ARE TRUE TO THE BEST OF MY KNOWLEDGE AND BELIEF. Albertas Rakauskas (SIGNATURE OF ALIEN)

P-18185 REMINGTON RAND Printed in U.S.A. I. & N. SERVICE FORM I-53 (1-1-51)

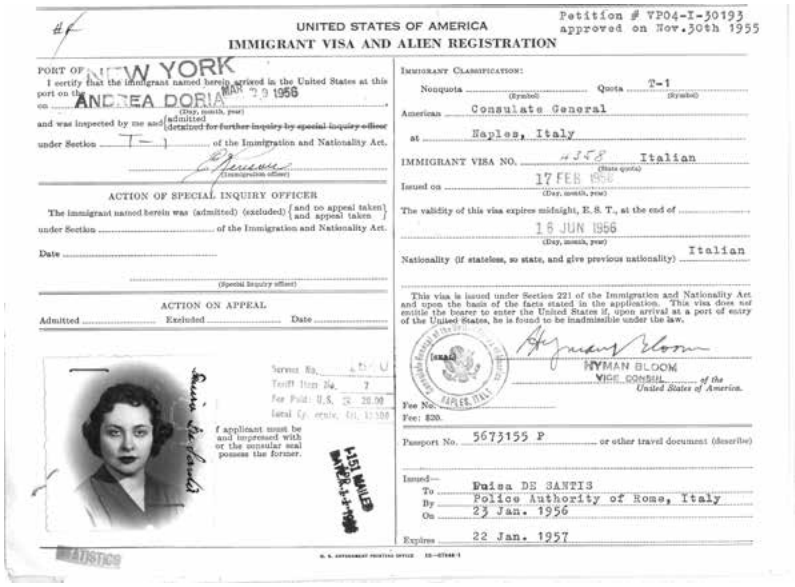
Albertas Rakauskas, born March 19, 1905 in Lithuania, resided in Omaha, Nebraska.

The USCIS Genealogy Program offers two primary services for researchers—an Index Search and a Record Copy Request. For a fee, USCIS staff will search its historical indexes for file citations related to an individual. The search will identify all relevant files and explain how to request copies of the records. Researchers pursuing dual citizenship should note that the USCIS cannot certify documents, but they can provide certification of non-existence of a record (or no naturalization record) of deceased immigrants.

How Have Researchers Used the A-Files?

Start the search for a particular A-File in the National Archives' Archival Research Catalog (ARC). Search ARC by first name, surname, or by A-Number. Requests for A-Files should include the full name of the alien, the ARC Identifier (also known as National Archives Identifier), and the A-Number. Archives staff can help you with this process if you do not have access to a computer.

Since the files were first opened in late 2010, the regional archives at Kansas City and at San Francisco have received nearly 1,000 requests for information from the A-Files.



UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
IMMIGRANT VISA AND ALIEN REGISTRATION

Petition # VP04-I-30193 approved on Nov.30th 1955

PORT OF NEW YORK
I certify that the immigrant named herein arrived in the United States at this port on the ANDREA DORIA on MAR 29 1956 (Day, month, year) and was inspected by me and admitted / detained for further inquiry by special inquiry officer under Section 7-1 of the Immigration and Nationality Act.

(Immigration officer)

ACTION OF SPECIAL INQUIRY OFFICER
The immigrant named herein was (admitted) (excluded) and to appeal taken / and appeal taken under Section ... of the Immigration and Nationality Act.
Date ...
(Special inquiry officer)

ACTION ON APPEAL
Admitted ... Excluded ... Date ...

IMMIGRANT CLASSIFICATION:
Nonquota ... (Symbol) Quota 7-1 (Symbol)
American Consulate General
at Naples, Italy
IMMIGRANT VISA NO. 4358 (State quota) Italian
Issued on 17 FEB 1956 (Day, month, year)
The validity of this visa expires midnight, E. S. T., at the end of 15 JUN 1956 (Day, month, year)
Nationality (if stateless, so state, and give previous nationality) Italian

This visa is issued under Section 221 of the Immigration and Nationality Act and upon the basis of the facts stated in the application. This visa does not entitle the bearer to enter the United States if, upon arrival at a port of entry of the United States, he is found to be inadmissible under the law.

HYMAN BLOOM
VICE CONSUL of the United States of America.

Fee No. ... Fee: $20.
Passport No. 5673155 P or other travel document (describe)
Issued—
To Luisa DE SANTIS
By Police Authority of Rome, Italy
On 23 Jan. 1956
Expires 22 Jan. 1957

If applicant must be and impressed with or the consular seal possess the former.

Luisa de Santis, born July 19, 1909, immigrated to New York from Italy on March 29, 1956.

Family historians, authors, journalists, and demographic historians have discovered that the snapshot of a life captured in the files is priceless. Stemming from the original "inventory" in 1940, the documentation of our foreign-born ancestry through the A-Files has evolved and opened up new avenues for understanding the past.

To learn more about

- The A-Files and how to the request them, go to *www.archives.gov/research/immigration/aliens/*.
- The Archival Research Catalog, go to *www.archives.gov/research/arc/*.
- The evolution of the A-Files, see Paul Wormser's 1995 paper, "Documenting Immigrants: An Examination of Immigration and Naturalization Service Case Files" at *www.archives.gov/research/immigration/case-files.pdf*.

Author

Elizabeth Burnes is an archivist at the National Archives at Kansas City. She received a bachelor's degree in history from Truman State University and a master's in history and museum studies from the University of Missouri at St. Louis.

Marisa Louie is an archivist at the National Archives at San Francisco. She was formerly the Program Coordinator at the Chinese Historical Society of America and is an alumna of the "In Search of Roots" Program. She holds a bachelor's degree in American studies and environmental studies from the University of California at Santa Cruz.

A Life Imagined: The A-File of Umeyo Kawano

"On the boat the first thing we did – before deciding who we liked and didn't like, before telling each other which one of the islands we were from, and why we were leaving, before even bothering to learn each other's names – was compare photographs of our husbands. . . . On the boat, we often wondered: Would we like them? Would we love them? Would we recognize them from their pictures when we first saw them on the dock?"

—"Come, Japanese!" *The Buddha in the Attic*

Umeyo Kawano (left) was the picture bride of Suikichi Kawano (right), a widowed farmer from Tulare, California.

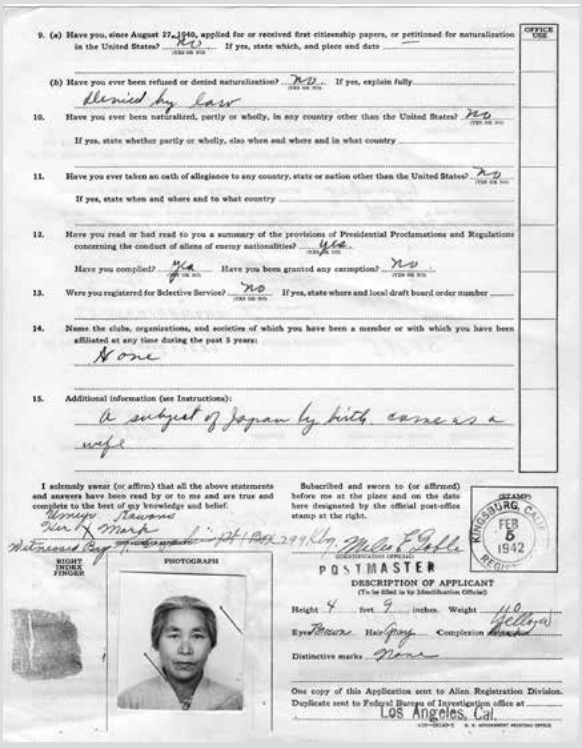
Julie Otsuka's 2011 novel *The Buddha in the Attic* gives voice to Japanese immigrant women of the early 20th century. As young "picture brides" destined to marry Japanese farmers, merchants, and others who had settled the western United States, these women raised families and built homes and businesses. Years later, they would be uprooted and interned during World War II, forced to start anew after the war.

Umeyo Kawano (A2579173) is one of thousands of immigrants whose A-Files have come to the National Archives at San Francisco. Born in Hiroshima, Japan, in 1889, Umeyo Nakahara immigrated to San Francisco in 1913 as the picture bride of Saikichi Kawano, a widowed farmer from Tulare, California. Her A-File includes photographs of her and her husband-to-be; she wears a patterned kimono and obi and stands next to a vase of blooming roses. There is the requisite letter from the consulate general of Japan in San Francisco, testifying to Saikichi's "good character . . . and means" and a transcript of her interview before the Board of Special Inquiry at Angel Island Immigration Station.

From examining census and vital records, we know that the Kawanos lived in Kingsburg and Selma, agricultural towns in central California, with their three sons and five daughters. Umeyo's A-File picks up in 1940, as she registered under the requirements of the Alien Registration Act by completing the Form AR-2. Two years later, just days before President Roosevelt's Executive Order 9066, she registered as an "Alien of Enemy Nationality." (This form deals frankly with the matter of Umeyo's nationality – she writes that naturalized American citizenship had always been a right "denied [to her] by law.") A handful of Address Record Cards track her family's movement from their homes to an assembly center in Fresno, California, and then across the United States to Jerome War Relocation Center in southeastern Arkansas, where they remained throughout World War II.

One is struck by what might be read between the lines of these forms and documents. Was Umeyo nervous as she answered the three immigration inspectors in 1913? How did she feel about her son's military service in the U.S. Army while she was interned in Arkansas? What of her former life awaited her when she returned to Selma in 1945?

While these federal records and books like *The Buddha in the Attic* can help us imagine the thoughts and feelings of these immigrant women, we in the National Archives eagerly wait for the day when Umeyo's descendants seek these records here and share their part of her story.


9. (a) Have you, since August 27, 1940, applied for or received first citizenship papers, or petitioned for naturalization in the United States? No If yes, state which, and place and date

(b) Have you ever been refused or denied naturalization? No If yes, explain fully. denied by law

10. Have you ever been naturalized, partly or wholly, in any country other than the United States? No

If yes, state whether partly or wholly, also when and where and in what country

11. Have you ever taken an oath of allegiance to any country, state or nation other than the United States? No

If yes, state when and where and to what country

12. Have you read or had read to you a summary of the provisions of Presidential Proclamations and Regulations concerning the conduct of aliens of enemy nationalities? Yes

Have you complied? Yes Have you been granted any exemption? No

13. Were you registered for Selective Service? No If yes, state where and local draft board order number

14. Name the clubs, organizations, and societies of which you have been a member or with which you have been affiliated at any time during the past 5 years: None

15. Additional information (see Instructions): A subject of Japan by birth, married a wife

I solemnly swear (or affirm) that all the above statements and answers have been read by or to me and are true and complete to the best of my knowledge and belief.

Umeyo Kawano

Subscribed and sworn to (or affirmed) before me at the place and on the date here designated by the official post-office stamp at the right.

(STAMP) KINGSBURG, CALIF. FEB 6 1942 REC'D

POSTMASTER

RIGHT INDEX FINGER PHOTOGRAPH

DESCRIPTION OF APPLICANT

Height 4 feet 9 inches. Weight 110 (Yellow)

Eyes Brown Hair Gray Complexion Dark

Distinctive marks None

One copy of this Application sent to Alien Registration Division.
Duplicate sent to Federal Bureau of Investigation office at Los Angeles, Cal.

Umeyo Kawano's February 1942 Application for Certificate of Identification provides her residence prior to wartime relocation as Selma, California.