



# National Archives and Records Administration

THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES AT SAN FRANCISCO

## HOW TO INQUIRE ABOUT IMMIGRATION CASE FILES FROM HOME

The National Archives (NARA) at San Francisco holds more than 200,000 investigative case files of several types created by Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) District Offices in San Francisco and Honolulu. Most concern Asian immigrants and Asian Americans from all over the United States who were investigated under various immigration laws including the “Chinese Exclusion Acts,” 1882-1943. Case files were created when individuals traveled to or from the U.S. through the ports of San Francisco and Honolulu. These holdings include files of immigrants detained at Angel Island Immigration Station and similar facilities.

The staff at the National Archives at San Francisco can assist in identifying individual case files. Because of the complex nature of INS record keeping and because many immigration files remain in the legal custody of U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), **we strongly encourage you to contact NARA before visiting our facility.** This will enable staff members to provide efficient public service and to prepare for your visit if original records are found.

As you prepare to contact NARA, review these guidelines. Step 3 contains a list of information helpful for identifying an individual case file in our records. You may contact NARA by e-mail, fax, or postal mail. Contact information is provided below. Staff will generally reply within ten working days of receiving an inquiry.

1. Search for copies of old immigration documents such as Certificates of Identity, Certificates of Residence, or steamship tickets, and naturalization documents. Send copies of these documents – NOT the originals – with your inquiry. When copying documents, copy both the front and reverse sides. Immigration officials noted dates and case file numbers and made endorsements on the reverse sides of documents. Any hand-written numbers on old documents could help locate case files. See the next page for examples of these documents.
2. Check the NARA-SF online case files index. This database, created by staff members and dedicated volunteers, is available at: <http://casefiles.berkeley.edu>. If you find a match, provide NARA staff with the case ID that you find. This database is not complete, so if you don't find a match, proceed to step 3.
3. To search for a case file for a specific person, send NARA staff the following information in your inquiry:
  - a. **Names of the individual** who immigrated, including “paper” names, maiden names, and alternative spellings. What is most helpful here is how the name would have been written by immigration authorities and on other legal documents. Unfortunately, we have no way to refer to our files with someone's name as written in Chinese characters or other non-Romanized languages.
  - b. **Dates (specific or approximate) of immigration/arrival** into the United States. If they often returned to their country of origin (as was the case with men who went back to visit their wives or brought family over) it's helpful to know when they made these subsequent trips, if you do know. Knowing about these later voyages is often more important than the date of initial immigration.
  - c. **Date of birth** (specific or approximate)
  - d. **Names of family members** traveling with them or to whom they were going to live with in the U.S.
  - e. **How they entered the U.S.** (as the child of a citizen, a merchant, a “paper son”, etc.)
  - f. **Where they lived** after they arrived in the U.S.
  - g. Whether they later became **naturalized citizens**: if they lived in the San Francisco area, we can search our facility's federal court naturalization records for additional information.

The National Archives likely does not maintain the case files of individuals who (1) arrived in the United States after 1955, (2) participated in the Chinese Amnesty (“Confession”) program, or (3) became naturalized citizens after March 31, 1956. However, staff can provide you with guidance for requesting these records from USCIS.

04/2012 ML

If your family has any original documents, like copies of certificates of identity, naturalization certificates, etc., you're in luck! These will be very helpful in searching for immigration records. You should send the information on these documents or photos/copies of them. (Please do NOT send original documents.) Here are some examples of what these documents look like. (Note that these reproductions are not to scale.)

**UNITED STATES OF AMERICA**  
**DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE**  
**IMMIGRATION AND NATURALIZATION SERVICE**

No. **20306145**

**CERTIFICATE OF NATURALIZATION**

*Personal description of holder as of date of naturalization:*  
 Date of birth: **JULY 09, 1917**  
 Sex: **MALE**  
 Height: **5 feet 08 inches**  
 Marital status: **MARRIED**  
 Country of former nationality: **CHINA, MAINLAND**

*I certify that the description given is true, and that the photograph affixed hereto is a likeness of me.*  
**CHUNG CHOW YEE**  
*(Complete and true signature of holder)*

*Be it known that, pursuant to an application filed with the Attorney General at: LOS ANGELES, CA*  
 The Attorney General having found that:  
**CHUNG CHOW YEE**  
*then residing in the United States, intends to reside in the United States when so required by the Naturalization Laws of the United States, and had in all other respects complied with the applicable provisions of such naturalization laws and was entitled to be admitted to citizenship, such person having taken the oath of allegiance in a ceremony conducted by the*  
**U.S. DISTRICT COURT FOR THE CENTRAL DIST. OF CALIFORNIA**  
*at: LOS ANGELES, CA on: AUGUST 27TH, 1993*  
*that such person is admitted as a citizen of the United States of America.*

*IT IS PUNISHABLE BY U. S. LAW TO COPY, PRINT OR PHOTOGRAPH THIS CERTIFICATE WITHOUT LAWFUL AUTHORITY.*

*Christine S. Lee*  
 Commissioner of Immigration and Naturalization

**DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE**

**Certificate of Naturalization**

**U.S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR**  
 IMMIGRATION AND NATURALIZATION SERVICE

**DESCRIPTION**

Name: **JEONG HOP**  
 Age: **7** Height: **4** N. **3**  
 Occupation: **Student, San Francisco, California**  
 Admitted as **Son of Son of Native (Parol Evidence)** -  
**40317/11-12, SS "President Coolidge", Sept. 27, 1940**  
 Physical marks and peculiarities: **Round scar outer corner each eye; large scar on back of head**  
 Issued at the port of **San Francisco, California** -  
 this **25th** day of **November** 19 **40**

*John D. Hoff*  
 Inspector General

**Certificate of Identity**

This card must be presented to Immigration Officer at port of debarkation.

此券各自御上陸地ノ移民官ニ渡願上候

MANIFEST SHEET NO. **5** LINE NO. **11**

NAME **Wong Shee**

Ticket # **5852**

**PRESIDENT CLEVELAND** VOY. **7**

FROM **HONGKONG** TO **SAN FRANCISCO**

Esta tarjeta debera ser presentada al oficial de Emigracion en el puerto de desembarque.

在入境之口岸務要將此卡紙交與移民局官員收

**Ship Boarding Documents**