

Immigrant Correspondence at the National Archives, ca. 1890-1944

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Marian Smith

This session will discuss important series of immigration and nationality correspondence available to researchers only at the National Archives in Washington, DC. This handout identifies file series, finding aids (original and new!), and standard research procedures, many of which overlap.

Immigration Correspondence Timeline

US Immigration Service correspondence dates back to 1882 because the Service inherited the records created by the Treasury Secretary under the general immigration law of 1882. The US Immigration Service began operation in July 1891 and maintained correspondence files thereafter.

Immigration Correspondence is comprised of a variety of record series and finding aids, as depicted in the chart below. Each item is described further in this handout, arranged by Entry number.

1882	1883	1884	1885	1886	1887	1888	1889	1890	1891	1892	1893	1894	1895	1896	1897	1898	1899	1900	1901	1902	1903	1904	1905	1906	1907	1908	1909	1910	1911	1912	1913	1914	1915	1916	1917	1918	1919	1953	1954	1955	1956	1957
Register of Letters Received, 1882-87 (Entry 1, 2 vols)						Register of Letters Received, 1891-1903, (Entry 3, 27 vols)											Subject Index to Subject Correspondence & Case Files, ca. 1906-1959 (T-458)																									
														Name Index 5/97-1/99 (Ent 2)		Misc. Name index, ca 1903-1910 (Entry 4a & 4b)																										
														Misc. Subject Index, ca 1903-1910 (Entry 5)																												
Letters Received, 1882-1906 (Entry 7) - 154 boxes																Subject Correspondence & Case Files (letters received & sent), ca 1906-1957 (Entry 9+)																										
Letters Sent 1882-1887 (Entry 8 E, 2 vols)						Letters Sent, 1892-1903 (Entry 8 T, 14 vols)																																				
											General Letters Sent, 1891-1912 (Entry 8 Gen, 342 vols)																															
											Ellis Island letters sent, July 1903-Dec 1912 (NARA-DC Entry 151)																															

Part I: Early Immigration Correspondence

Early Immigration Correspondence, ca. 1882-1906 – Finding Aids

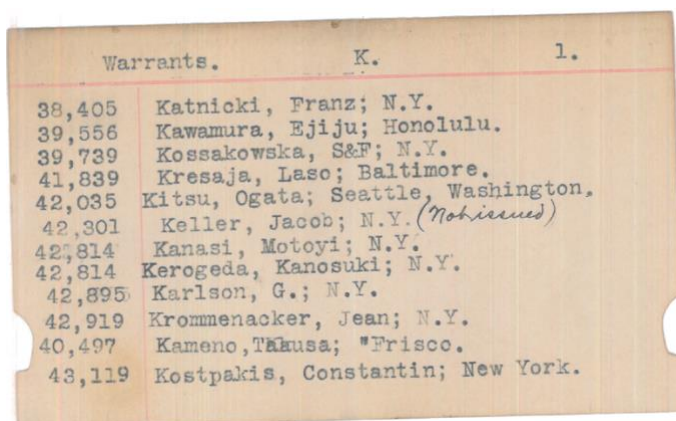
- Register of Letters Received, 1882-87 (Entry 1, 2 vols) **NAID 1560882** – Most correspondence for these years involves administration of the law and includes few “immigrant cases.”

- Register of Letters Received, 1891-1903, (Entry 3, 27 vols) **NAID 1561313** – Arranged by date received, these registers identify the letter (file) number, correspondent, location (city) of correspondent, subject, and reference to response to the letter. When searching by date of immigrant arrival start on that date and read the subject for every entry from that port (city) until at least two weeks after the start date.

- Name Index 5/97-1/99 (Entry 2) **NAID 1560905**. This index to register volumes largely indexes the names of Federal and State government officials, Congressmen, and other high-profile correspondents. This index is generally not useful for searching immigrant names.

Entry 3 Volumes					
by Date and by Letter Number					
Volume	Beginning Date	Ending Date	From Letter	To Letter	
1	7/12/1891	1/7/1892	1?	1415	
2	1/7/1892	8/9/1892	1416	3543	
3	8/9/1892	6/23/1893	3544	4953	
4	6/23/1893	2/28/1894	4954	6368	
5	2/28/1894	10/15/1894	6369	7787	
6	10/15/1894	6/13/1895	7799	9200	
7	6/13/1895	2/26/1896	9201	10642	
8	2/26/1896	9/14/1896	10643	12086	
9	9/14/1896	5/5/1897	12087	13502	
10	5/5/1897	11/11/1897	13503	14943	
11	11/11/1897	6/7/1898	14944	16388	
12	6/7/1898	1/11/1899	16389	17829	
13	1/11/1899	7/28/1899	17830	19322	
14	7/28/1899	1/27/00	19323	20822	
15	1/27/00	6/12/00	20823	22332	
16	6/12/00	11/3/00	22333	23815	
17	11/3/00	4/15/01	23816	26198	
18	4/15/01	9/7/01	26199	27684	
19	9/7/01	1/25/02	27685	29189	
20	1/27/02	5/26/02	29190	30676	
21	5/26/02	9/3/02	30677	32172	
22	9/3/02	12/3/02	32173	33677	
23	12/3/02	2/5/03	33678	35182	
24	2/5/03	4/6/03	35183	36682	
25	4/6/03	5/28/03	36683	38182	
26	5/28/03	7/17/03	38183	39682	
27	7/17/03	9/11/03	39683	41183	

- Misc. Name index, ca 1903-1910 (Entry 4) **NAID 4709010**



Sample Entry 4 index card showing “K names” under the category “Warrants.”

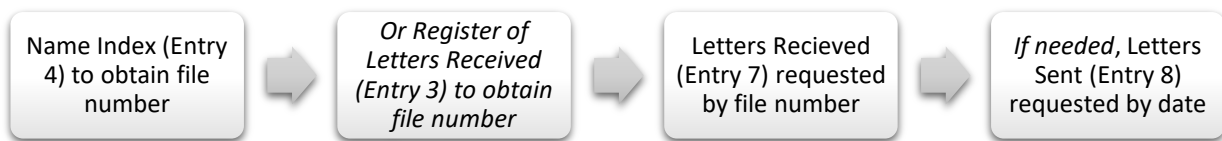
- **Name Index by Category** (Entry 4a)
 - This index was long neglected due to frustrations with a categorical arrangement. It has now been [digitized and the names keyed to the NARA Catalog @ NAID 4709010](#).
- **Name Index** (Entry 4b)
 - This index is arranged by name so is usable in person at NARA in DC. Some portions of the alphabet are missing. [Digitization to catalog in progress.](#)

- Misc. Subject Index, ca 1903-1910 (Entry 5) **NAID 1561441** – Because it is arranged by subject this index is impossible to search by name.

Early Immigration Correspondence, ca. 1882-1906 – Files

- Letters Received, 1882-1906 (Entry 7) NAID 1564919 - 154 boxes. Arranged by letter file number, these files contain incoming correspondence and any supporting documentation. Letter files usually contain a copy of the letter sent in response, but if not search the file for notation of the response (“Ans’d”) date which can be used to request the reply letter from Entry 8.
- Letters Sent, 1882-1912 (Entry 8) NAID 1566701 – Tissue copies of all outgoing correspondence from the Office of the Superintendent, later Commissioner-General, of Immigration in Washington, DC. All letters sent are arranged chronologically by date. Some of these dates overlap (i.e., Entries 8T and 8 Gen for the years 1892-1903).
 - Letters Sent 1882-1887 (Entry 8 E, 2 vols)
 - Letters Sent, 1892-1903 (Entry 8 T, 14 vols)
 - General Letters Sent, 1891-1912 (Entry 8 Gen, 342 vols)
- Ellis Island letters sent, July 1903-Dec 1912 (NARA-DC Entry 151) NAID 5049324 – Tissue copies of all outgoing correspondence from the Office of the New York City Port Commissioner of Immigration at Ellis Island. Arranged by date. If searching for an immigrant with a specific arrival date, begin reading on that date forward for one to two weeks.

Early Immigration Correspondence, ca. 1882-1906 – Research Process



No. 4289. *Office of U. S. Commissioner of Immigration,
Ellis Island, New York Harbor.*

June 20, 1895.

Commissioner General of Immigration,
Washington, D. C.

Sir:

Moses Kur, aged 28, native of Russia, arrived at this port per s/s "Marsala" June 15, 1895. Appearing before the Board of Special Inquiry he testified that he had a wife and two children in Russia; that he paid his own passage to this country; that he was a blacksmith by trade; that he was going to his brother, Abram Kur, at 232 E. 3rd St., New York City; and that he had no money. He was

Part II: Immigration [Subject] Correspondence, 1906-1957

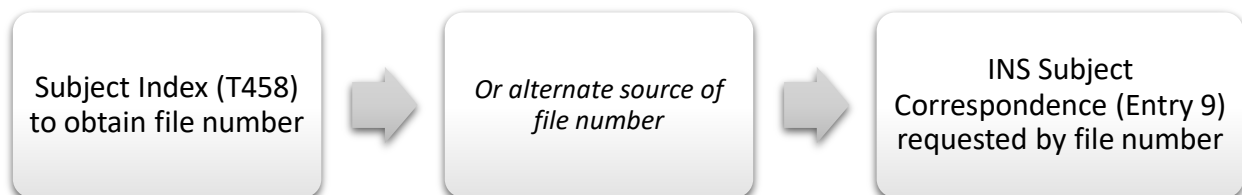
INS Subject and Policy Correspondence Files, 1906-1957 – Finding Aid

- Subject Index to Subject Correspondence & Case Files, ca. 1906-1959 (1957) (National Archives Microfilm Publication T-458) NAID 1561441
 - Arranged by SUBJECT, this index combined the subject indexes to the Immigration Correspondence and the Naturalization Correspondence into one subject index.
 - Though NOT a name index, *Ancestry.com* keyed the names found therein which can be searched online for free at any NARA location.
 - T458 is NOT a complete name index to all Subject and Policy Correspondence Files
 - <https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/1946/>
 - Immigration Correspondence file numbers dated 1906 and after will all begin with the number “5,” and follow this format: 5XXXX/XXX, 5XXXX-XXX
 - When using the index, note the file number, subject entry, and date of the index entry. If no date appears for the specific entry note any dates immediately above or below the entry, or the date at the top of the card.
 - Use the file number to request the file from Entry 9.

INS Subject and Policy Correspondence Files, 1906-1957 – Files

- Subject and Policy Correspondence Files (letters received & sent), ca 1906-1957 (Entry 9) NAID 559947
 - INS Subject Correspondence Files cover both agency administrative topics and individual immigrant cases. Immigrant cases include appeals to Board of Special Inquiry decisions, bonds, deportation, and general information inquiries sent by immigrants or their friends.

INS Subject and Policy Correspondence Files, 1906-1957 – Research Process



Part III: Naturalization Correspondence

The US Bureau of Naturalization Correspondence, 1906-ca 1946 (aka Administrative Files Relating to Naturalization) holds all incoming and outgoing correspondence of the US Naturalization Service for the early to mid-20th century. The series is organized by a subject-number series and referenced by either a name index or subject index. Half or more of the surviving files relate to individual immigrant cases.

1906	1907	1908	1909	1910	1911	1912	1913	1914	1915	1916	1917	1918	1919	1920	1921	1922	1923	1924	1925	1926	1927	1928	1929	1930	1931	1932	1933	1934	1935	1936	1937	1938	1939	1940	1941	1942	1943	1944	1945	1946
Subject Index, NARA Microfilm Publication T458																																								
Name Index, NARA Microfilm Publication A3388, NARA ID: 1593296																																								
Administrative Files Relating to Naturalization, Record Group 85, Entry 26, NARA ID 563066																																								
Oversized Enclosures to Administrative Files Relating to Naturalization, 1906-1944, Record Group 85, Entry 27																																								
Education and Americanization Files, 1914-1936, RG 8, Entry 30																																								
																												Citizenship Education Program Files, 1935-1954, RG 85, Entry 33												

Finding Aids - The Name Index

Name Index to Bureau of Naturalization Correspondence Files, 1906 – 1946

Record Group 85, NARA Microfilm Publication A3388, NAID: 1593296

Available to researchers at Archives I (DC) and NARA Chicago (as of May 2021)

Guidance: *See the descriptive pamphlet for microfilm A3388 in the National Archives' online searchable catalog.*

See also [NARA's Research Guide](#)

See also [USCIS guidance](#) on using this index

Experience with the Name Index (A3388) shows over 90% of files are found indexed by name in the name index.

Finding Aids - The Subject Index

Subject Index to Correspondence and Case Files of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, 1903-1952. NARA microfilm publication T458, NAID 4490783.

- Ancestry.com. [U.S. Subject Index to Correspondence and Case Files of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, 1903-1959](#) [database on-line or free at NARA locations]
- Experience with the Subject Index (T458) shows less than 15 to 20% of files are found indexed by name in the Subject Index.

Useful when searching either of the above indices: [Directory of Courts Having Jurisdiction in Naturalization Proceedings, Fifth Edition, June 1, 1932](#) (NAID 192128920)

The Files

Administrative Files Relating to Naturalization, 1906-1946

AKA *Bureau of Naturalization Correspondence Files, 1906-1944*

National Archives, Washington, DC, Record Group 85, **Entry 26**, NAID 563066

1,739+ boxes

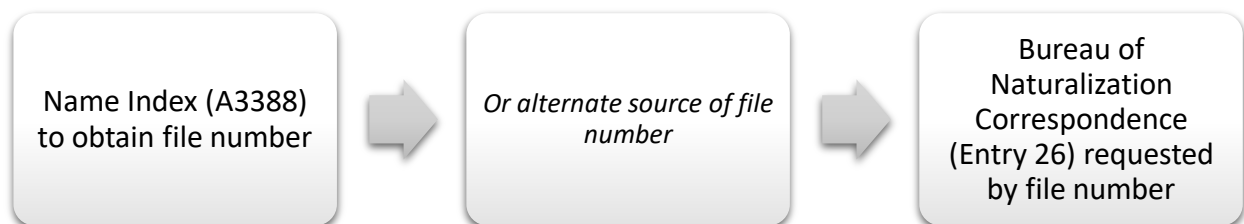
Guidance: [Research Guide to Selected Bureau of Naturalization Case and Correspondence Files, 1906–1946](#)

Bureau of Naturalization correspondence covers internal policy and housekeeping matters as well as hundreds of thousands of files opened upon receipt of a letter from an immigrant, or from his/her friend, family, or neighbor. The files are organized by a topical subject number, followed by an individual case number. Additionally:

- Certain topical numbers (i.e., 8/, 23/, 77/, etc.) precede the majority of correspondence from immigrants and private individuals.
- Access to the files is gained via the Name Index (A3388) or the Subject Index (T458).
- Certain subject numbers grew so large they were separated into their own sets and are now identified as separate series at Archives I:

Entry #	Entry 26 and its “spinoff entries”	Volume
Entry 26	Administrative Files Relating to Naturalization, 1906-1944, NAID 563066	1,739+ boxes
Entry 27	Oversized Enclosures to Administrative Files Relating to Naturalization, 1906-1944, NAID 4728390	2 boxes
Entry 30	Education and Americanization Files, 1914-1936 This series opened using the base file number 27671/ from Entry 26. Indices often substitute the letter “E” for the base number (i.e., “E378” or “E/378” = “27671/378”) – NAID 4730950	420 boxes
Entry 31	Oversized Enclosures to Education and Americanization Files, 1914-1936, NAID 4731925	12 boxes +
Entry 33	Citizenship Education Program Files, 1935-1954, NAID 4734721	91 containers

Naturalization Correspondence Research Process



I&N Correspondence

(at Archives I in DC)

Immigration Correspondence

Letters Received, 1882-1906
Entry 7

Registers of
Letters Received,
1891-1903

Name Index,
1903-1912
Entry 4

INS Subject Correspondence,
1906-1957
Entry 9

Name Index,
1903-1912
Entry 4

INS Subject Index
1906-1957
T-458

Naturalization Correspondence

Bureau of Naturalization
Correspondence, 1906-1946
Entry 26

Name Index to B
of N Corresp.
A3388

INS Subject Index
1906-1957
T-458

TWO categories of records, **THREE** sets of files, and **FOUR** indexes (used **SIX** ways), plus one option*

USCIS Genealogy
Index Search*