

CHINESE IMMIGRATION RECORDS

HELD AT REGIONAL NATIONAL ARCHIVES

From 1882 to 1943 the United States Government severely curtailed immigration from China to the United States by enacting a series of legislative actions commonly referred to as the Chinese Exclusion Acts. Certain Federal agencies were particularly active in enforcing the exclusion laws. Both the Chinese Bureau within the Customs Service and the Chinese Division of the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) employed "Chinese" inspectors, people designated to enforce the Chinese exclusion laws. Immigration-related decisions made by these Federal officials were sometimes appealed to Federal courts, which also heard criminal cases involving Chinese alleged to be living in the United States illegally. Many of the records created to implement the Chinese exclusion laws are now in the custody of the National Archives and Records Administration's (NARA) Regional Archives. Because many of these records relate to individual immigrants, they are invaluable for the study of Chinese and Chinese-American family history. The records often include original photographs and transcripts of interrogations conducted by immigration inspectors.

Examples:

Chee Kim Lan – Certificate of Identity, 1908



DESCRIPTION	
Name: <i>Chee Kim Lan</i>	
Age: <i>4</i>	Height: <i>3 ft. 3-1/2 in.</i>
Occupation: <i>Student</i>	
Local residence: <i>Maunaloa, Hilo, Hawaii, I. I.</i>	
Physical marks and peculiarities: <i>Very small mole on left eyebrow</i>	
Issued in the Territory of Hawaii, this <i>26</i> day of <i>October</i> , 1908	
<i>[Signature]</i> Inspector in Charge.	

Chee Kim Piu – Certificate of Identity, 1908

DESCRIPTION



Name: *Chee Nim Poo*
 Age: *1* Height: *3* *11 1/2* in.
 Occupation: *Student*
 Local residence: *Waiolama, Waialeale, Kauai, 10/10/1900*
 Physical marks and peculiarities: *Small mole on right side of face, and small ^{55880/2980} ~~scars~~ *scars* on each ear*
Dead
 Issued in the Territory of Hawaii this *22* day of *October*, 190*0*
[Signature]
 Inspector in Charge.

Chee Wah, Chinese Exclusion Act Case File, 1921

U. S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR
IMMIGRATION SERVICE

5528/795

Office of Inspector in Charge
Port of Los Angeles, Calif.
August 29, 1921, 19

F APH.



Name: JEE WAH alias JEE
KAI QUOON alias GE
AN WA. Height: 5 ft. 2 1/2 in. Age: 60
Color of eyes: brown Complexion: brown
Identification marks: Large scar in center of forehead.

Q What is your name? A Jee Wah.
Q What is your family name? A Jee.
Q What other name besides Jee Wah have you?
A I have a marriage name; Jee Kai Quoon.
Q Have you ever been known by any other names? A No.
Q How old are you? A 60 years.
Q What is your occupation? A Cook on a steamer.
Q How children have you?
A I had ten children; two are dead, eight living.
Q Give me the names of your living children, their sex and ages?
A Gim Bew, age 21, boy. Gim Lon, age 19, married (girl).
Gim Ngook, " 17, girl. Gim Ho, " 14, girl.
Gim Ling, " 10, boy. Gim Sing, " 7, boy.
Gim Haw, " 6, girl. Gim Oy, " 3, girl.
Q Who are the two that died?
A Jee Gim You; he was drowned in Honolulu.
Q What was his age when he was drowned?
A Five years.
Q How many years since he was drowned?
A More than ten years.
Q Was he the oldest child, the first born?
A He was the fifth child.
Q The other child that died?
A Jee Gin Ngon, girl.
Q What child was that?
A Sixth child.
Q Where did she die?
A Honolulu.
Q Did you ever have more than one wife?
A Only one wife.
Q Is she a Chinese woman?
A Yes.
Q Is she still living?
A Yes.

Questions to consider to determine:

Whether your ancestor had an immigration case file...

Whether your ancestor's immigration case file is maintained by the National Archives...

Which National Archives facility to begin a search...

Is my ancestor documented in federal immigration records?

•When did he/she immigrate to the United States?

–Before the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882?

–If before 1882, did they ever travel outside of the U.S. (e.g., back to China) and then return to the U.S.?

•Did any of my American-born ancestors travel outside of the United States?

–Until 1943, American citizens of Chinese descent were tracked by the U.S. government and had to receive “return permits” to re-enter the U.S.

In general:

1. If an individual entered the U.S. before 1882 and never went back to China, there would not be a case file for him/her.
2. If someone went back to China, never returned to the U.S., and never filed for a return certificate, there would not be a case file for him/her.
3. If someone was born in the U.S. and never traveled outside of the U.S., there would not be a case file for him/her.

Is my ancestor's immigration file maintained by the National Archives?

•When did he/she immigrate to the United States?

–**Before or after 1944?** Beginning in 1944, the government instituted a new system for filing records known as the “A-Files” (Alien File).

•Did my ancestor become a naturalized citizen?

–Until the repeal of the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1943, Chinese were not allowed to become naturalized citizens.

–**Between 1943-1956?** Their immigration records could have ended up in a number of different places... best to first check with the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS).

–**After March 31, 1956?** Your ancestor has an A-File that may be at the National Archives or still with USCIS.

•Did my ancestor participate in the “Confession” program?

–If your ancestor “confessed”, he/she has an A-File that may be at the National Archives or still with USCIS.

Where should I begin my search?

–National Archives field offices maintain INS records for their geographic area of jurisdiction. Determine which field office would have your ancestor’s immigration records based on their port of entry.

–The National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) Reference Information Paper 99, “Chinese Immigration and the Chinese in the United States”, provides a list of Chinese immigration records held at the various National Archive field offices. This publication is available for viewing online: <http://www.archives.gov/research/chinese-americans/guide.html>

–To find contact information for the National Archive field offices and to access the home pages of each field office, go to the National Archive homepage, <http://www.archives.gov>. Select the “Our Locations” button along the top of the homepage. On the “Locations Nationwide” page, select the tab “Research in Person”. The National Archive field offices for you to select will be displayed on the left-hand column.

Planning a visit or making a query to a NARA facility:

Anyone planning to visit a NARA facility can make the most of his or her visit by contacting the facility in advance. This is particularly true of those intending to view original records (e.g., immigration case files) as these must be retrieved by staff archivists and examined in designated textual research rooms. With some facilities, such as the National Archives at San Francisco, the view of original records can only be done through appointments scheduled at least 10 days in advance. In lieu of making a personal visit, one may contact a NARA facility to request a search for a case file for a specific person. For a fee, copies of records can be made and mailed.

When inquiring about immigration case files, you should gather and send the following information to National Archives staff:

(1) Copies of old immigration-related documents such as Certificates of Identity, Certificates of Residence, or steamship tickets, and naturalization documents. 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.

(2) Information about the individuals you are searching for, such as:

- 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 Romanized and written by immigration authorities and on other legal documents.

- 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.
- Date of birth (specific or approximate)
- Names of family members traveling with them or to whom they were going to live with in the U.S.
- How they entered the U.S. (as the child of a citizen, a merchant, a “paper son”, etc)
- Where they lived after they arrived in the U.S.
- Whether they later became naturalized citizens.

What you should know before your visit to a NARA facility:

–Before viewing original records at a NARA facility, all researchers must have a National Archives Researcher Identification Card. To obtain a Researcher Identification card, a researcher must be oriented as to the rules, procedures and practices for viewing and protecting original records.

–Viewing original records at a NARA facility is done in textual research rooms, under surveillance. The following items are not allowed in research rooms: Personal belongings such as handbags, backpacks, briefcases or containers of any; coats, hats or scarves; pens, markers, and highlighters; envelopes, notepads, or folders.

–The following items are allowed in textual research rooms: Pencils, NARA issued notepaper, laptops, cameras if the flash is disabled, personal computers, memory devices such as USB drives, and flatbed scanners (without auto-feed or printers).

–Reproduction of original documents is allowed. The amount of equipment available varies by facility. Some are well equipped with photocopiers (for a fee), scan-to-USB machines, and camera stands with LED table lamps. Others facilities have very little such equipment so being prepared with personal reproduction equipment is advised.