Timeline of US Immigration Laws



Depending when your immigrant ancestors sought citizenship, naturalization records can give you the precise date and port of arrival, the name of the ship, the port of departure, and the birth date and place. Being familiar with the United States' immigration laws will help you determine what documents may exist for your ancestor.

Want to learn more about US naturalization laws? Read our guide in the May 2008 Family Tree Magazine. You also can consult American Naturalization Processes and Procedures, 1790-1985 by John J. Newman (Heritage Quest, out of print) and They Became Americans: Finding Naturalization Records and Ethnic Origins by Loretto Dennis Szucs (Ancestry, \$19.95).

1790	US government establishes
	uniform naturalization rules
	for white males 21 and older;
	children of naturalized citizens
	get automatic citizenship

- 1795 Free white females age 21 and older can become citizens
- **1804** Alien widows and children receive citizenship if the husband or father died prior to filing final papers
- 1824 Alien minors, upon turning 21, can be naturalized if they've lived in the US for five years
- 1855 Alien women become citizens upon marrying US citizens
- **1862** Aliens who've received honorable discharges from the US Army can skip filing declarations of intention
- **1868** Former slaves become citizens under the 14th Amendment
- **1870** People of African descent may become citizens
- **1882** Government excludes Asians from citizenship
- 1887 Dawes Act entitles American Indians to become US citizens if they've accepted a land allotment
- **1891** US establishes Bureau of Immigration

- 1894 Declaration of intention requirement is waived for aliens who've received honorable discharges after serving five years in the Navy or Marine Corps
- 1906 Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization Service is established
- 1917 Puerto Ricans become US citizens
- 1922 Married women's citizenship becomes independent of her husband's
- **1924** American Indians are granted full citizenship
- **1929** Photographs are required on petition for naturalization
- **1940** Alien Registration Act passes
- 1943 Asian immigrants are allowed to become citizens
- 1952 Age requirement for naturalization drops to 18; declaration of intention becomes optional
- **1990** Courts no longer naturalize citizens
- 2003 Immigration and Naturalization Service becomes US Citizenship and Immigration Services

Toolkit

- Finding US Naturalization Records: A Genealogy Guide <home.att.net/~wee-monster/ naturalizationrecords.html>
- Footnote <footnote.com>
- Immigration Legal History <www.uscis.gov>: Click on Education and Resources on the horizontal tab, then Immigration Legal History on the vertical list.
- Immigration and Ships
 Passenger Lists Research Guide:
 Naturalization Records
 <home.att.net/~arnielang/
 ship08.html>
- List of Famous Naturalized
 Citizens of the United States
 <www.answers.com/topic/
 list-of-famous-naturalizedcitizens-of-the-united-states>
- NARA: Naturalization Records <archives.gov/genealogy/ naturalization>
- Naturalization Records in the US Citizenship and Immigration Services <www.uscis.gov>: Click on Education and Resources, then Genealogy.
- Prologue Magazine: Women and Naturalization, ca. 1802-1940 <archives.gov/publications/ prologue/1998/summer/ women-and-naturalization-1.html>
- Records for the Study of Ethnic History in the National Archives Pacific Region <archives.gov/pacific/ san-francisco/finding-aids/ ethnic-reference-paper.html>