NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS ADMINISTRATION
MICROFILM PUBLICATIONS

A3381

REGISTER OF FEDERAL COURT CASES RELATED TO CHINESE AMERICANS AND CHINESE IMMIGRANTS ARRIVING AT OR DEPARTING FROM SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA, ca. 1883–ca. 1916, AND HEAD TAX CARDS OF ALIEN SEAMEN EXAMINED AT SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA, 1921–1924

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National Archives and Records Administration
Washington, DC
2003

INTRODUCTION

On the single roll of this microfilm publication, A3381, are reproduced (1) a register of federal court cases related to Chinese Americans and Chinese immigrants arriving at or departing from San Francisco, California, ca. 1883–ca. 1916, and (2) head tax cards of seamen examined at San Francisco, California, 1921–1924. These records are part of the Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, Record Group (RG) 85.

BACKGROUND

Early records relating to immigration originated in regional customhouses. The U.S. Customs Service conducted its business by designating collection districts. Each district had a headquarters port with a customhouse and a collector of customs, the chief officer of the district. An act of March 2, 1819 (3 Stat. 489) required the captain or master of a vessel arriving at a port in the United States or any of its territories from a foreign country to submit a list of passengers to the collector of customs. The act also required that the collector submit a quarterly report or abstract, consisting of copies of these passenger lists, to the Secretary of State, who was required to submit such information at each session of Congress. After 1874, collectors forwarded only statistical reports to the Treasury Department. The lists themselves were retained by the collector of customs. Customs records were maintained primarily for statistical purposes.

On August 3, 1882, Congress passed the first Federal law regulating immigration (22 Stat. 214–215); the Secretary of the Treasury had general supervision over it between 1882 and 1891. The Office of Superintendent of Immigration in the Department of the Treasury was established under an act of March 3, 1891 (26 Stat. 1085), and was later designated a bureau in 1895 with responsibility for administering the alien contract-labor laws. In 1900 administration of the Chinese exclusion laws was added. Initially the Bureau retained the same administrative structure of ports of entry that the Customs Service had used. By the turn of the century it began to designate its own immigration districts, the numbers and boundaries of which changed over the years. In 1903 the Bureau became part of the Department of Commerce and Labor; its name was changed to the Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization when functions relating to naturalization were added in 1906. In 1933 the functions were transferred to the Department of Labor and became the responsibility of the newly formed Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS). Under President Roosevelt's Reorganization Plan V of 1940, the INS was moved to the Department of Justice.

RECORDS DESCRIPTION

This microfilm publication contains two unrelated record series that serve as finding aids to related records in the custody of National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) regional archives.

Register of Federal Court Cases Related to Chinese Americans and Chinese Immigrants Arriving at or Departing from San Francisco, California, ca. 1883–ca. 1916

This series contains 3- by 5-inch index cards arranged numerically by a court case number listed on the upper left corner. Some cards at the beginning are unnumbered and partly illegible.

Both the front and reverse side of the card were filmed side-by-side in a double column. The card image to the right is the front and contains all relevant information (described below). The card image to the left is the reverse side, which is either blank or contains unrelated or irrelevant information. The INS apparently re-used old cards in creating this register so unrelated information occasionally appears on the card backs. A "register" is typically a chronological and/or numerical listing or index.

The cards are arranged roughly numerically by court case number, next to which the court name is noted, often as an abbreviation (such as USDC NDC for U.S. District Court for the Northern District of California, USCC NDC for U.S. Circuit Court for the Northern District of California, or USDC NDNY for U.S. District Court for the Northern District of New York). Some cards note that a U.S. Commissioner heard the cases. Case numbers and court names are usually at the top of the card. Court case numbers are interfiled without regard to the name or location of court. References to Federal courts from across the United States are included. Because the case numbers are from various courts' dockets there is no corresponding rough chronological progression to them. Thus, the INS target (information sheet) at the beginning of the microfilm *inaccurately* describes these records as being "filed by serial numbers" and "arranged in chronological order."

Notes on numerical arrangement. The series begins with unnumbered cards, then cards numbered 3 thru 13637. There are substantial gaps and disarrangement in numbers higher than 13300. There are a few cards numbered in the 14000s and 15000s, and the final number is 29842.

Most cards list the name of the petitioner, claimant, or defendant. Many cards include INS-San Francisco District case file numbers and dates of arrival (some as early as 1884) in the U.S. that will assist researchers in locating related records. Some cards have extensive lists of names and INS case file numbers for relatives and witnesses. A few cards list immigration case file numbers from other INS districts. U.S. District Court, U.S. Circuit Court, and INS case files should be located in the NARA regional archives serving the state in which the court or INS office is located.

Although the cards refer to court cases throughout the United States, most concern cases in the U.S. Circuit Court and U.S. District Court in San Francisco, California. Most are habeas corpus petitions, although some are for admiralty

libels and revenue prosecutions. For cases heard by the U.S. District Court in San Francisco, habeas corpus cases are found in that court's admiralty docket in NARA microfilm publication M1249, *Admiralty Case Files [Private] of the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of California, 1850–1900* (401 rolls). Later District Court admiralty cases have not been microfilmed (as of 2003). Habeas corpus cases heard by the Circuit Court in San Francisco are on the civil docket and have not been microfilmed (as of 2003). The Commissioners of the U.S. Circuit Court in San Francisco also heard habeas corpus cases. Those cases have not been microfilmed (as of 2003).

The cards in this Register are extremely valuable because they provide a clear link between Federal court cases and particular INS-San Francisco District case files. Without this Register, this connection is often difficult to make because of spelling variations of Chinese names. This may have been one of the reasons why the INS's San Francisco office created the Register and collected information from other U.S. courts besides those in San Francisco. Collection of this data probably occurred when a traveler from another U.S. city applied for a return certificate in San Francisco and submitted as evidence court case papers documenting his or her nativity or lawful residence. During the 19th and 20th centuries, San Francisco was probably the most active U.S. Pacific port, and large numbers of Chinese Americans from throughout the U.S., as well as Chinese aliens, traveled through San Francisco for visits to China.

This register is most useful to researchers who have located a court case file and want to know if an individual had a corresponding INS case file.

Head Tax Cards of Alien Seamen Examined at San Francisco, California, 1921–1924

This series consists of INS Form Spl. 187-A, *Primary Inspection Memorandum* (described below). Each card-size form contains information about an European alien seaman who decided to remain in the U.S. The cards are arranged numerically by ship arrival number (described below) from 9827½ to 23435½, relating to vessels arriving from April 1901 to June 1924. However, most seaman appear to have been examined (inspected for legal admission to the U.S.) by the San Francisco INS office between ca. 1921 to ca. 1924.

The "ship arrival number" refers to the number assigned to a passenger or crew manifest by the INS-San Francisco District (hereinafter "INS-SF"). Sometime after the INS-SF assumed Chinese Exclusion Act functions from the Customs Service, the INS-SF began to number and (subsequently) renumber old passenger arrival manifests, departure manifests, and immigration documents. Numbering and/or renumbering was done about 1903, 1912, and later. The renumbering efforts created a "nearly incomprehensible mess" of INS-SF case files, since they are based on the "ship arrival number" either of the original numbering scheme or a subsequent numbering scheme.

Initially, only arrivals and departures of passenger vessels with Chinese nationals or Chinese Americans were given arrival and departure manifest numbers. After 1908, all passenger ship arrivals and departures were numbered. Subsequently, all ships, planes, PT boats, etc., of any significant function or size were assigned an INS-SF arrival number for each arrival at San Francisco. The complexity of the INS-SF filing system increased as anti-immigrant paranoia increased.

The "ship arrival number" may assist in locating an INS-SF investigative case file. The INS-SF investigative case file number for an arriving individual is composed of the ship arrival number plus the ticket number, or, after 1912, the arrival number plus the manifest page and line numbers. Thus, the number 10383/15/23 refers to manifest number 10383, page 15, line 23.

Form "Spl 187A," *Primary Inspection Memorandum*, which was used for alien arrivals, includes person's name, sex, age, marital status, occupation, ability to read and write and in what language, head tax status, citizenship, race, place of last permanent residence, destination, citizenship before becoming a citizen of Canada, port and date of arrival, destination, purpose for entering the U.S., intention of becoming a U.S. citizen, head tax status, and previous citizenships. It also includes the name and address of the friend or relative whom the alien intended to join, persons accompanying the alien, and the name and address of the alien's nearest relative or friend in the country from which he or she came. If the alien had ever been in the U.S. in the past, the dates and places of such residence or visitation are indicated. Additional information may be recorded on the reverse side of the card if the alien appealed a decision barring him or her from entering the U.S.

A head tax was required to be paid by persons entering the U.S. who were not citizens of the U.S., the Dominion of Canada, Newfoundland, the Republic of Cuba, or the Republic of Mexico.

GENERAL REMARKS

The records were filmed by the INS in 1957 and transferred to the National Archives and Records Administration on microfilm. Although some of this film may be difficult to read, it is impossible to correct the situation since the INS destroyed the original records.

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unnumbered
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9827½ – 23435½