

Naturalizations

Knox County, Tennessee

1792-1907

The following index of Naturalizations has been abstracted from the Knox County *Circuit, Criminal* and *Chancery Court* Minute Books. These courts being the “Court of Record and having a seal and Clerk and having common law jurisdiction” were the courts permitted by Federal law to process Naturalizations. The *Circuit, Criminal* and *Chancery Courts* processed the local Naturalizations until 1907 when changes in Federal law covering the Naturalization process led the local courts to abandon the process, transferring it to the local Federal Court. The Minute Books of the 3 courts have been checked through the year 1920 to verify no additional Naturalizations were processed in the local Knox County courts. One entry was found in the 1910 *Chancery* Minutes though a check in the Ancestry.com Federal Naturalization listings for Knox County confirm this was filed and processed in the Federal Court. All Minute Books have been searched for Naturalizations both via the index listing and by looking at every page because in too many instances the Naturalizations were not noted as such in the indices or were somehow not indexed.

The names in these records have been transcribed as best as possible, however, given the nature of the records and the variable handwriting of the clerks, there are bound to be misspellings. In many instances the clerks themselves spelled the names of the declarants or petitioners differently within the document. In such cases other source material has been referenced such as censuses or deeds in an attempt to use the standard, local family spelling but this by no means guarantees the spelling in this index is accurate. In cases where it is difficult to determine the actual surname or the spelling variation is distinct, the entry has been indexed under each possible spelling variation.

In many cases, the declarations or petitions are very detailed in giving personal information relating to the filer with such specifics as home city, home country, date of birth, arrival city, etc... and as such, may be the only source record with this detailed information.

Key to Column listings in this index:

Column Heading	Description
1. Surname	Last Name
2. Given Name	First Name
3. Middle Name	Middle Name
4. Date	Year of filing.
5. Country of Origin	Home country of the declarant or petitioner.
6. Type of Filing	Declaration or Petition (see “The Naturalization Process” on a following page for further explanation of this process).
7. Court	The court of record.
8. Minute Book	Minute Book Volume
9. Page	Page Number
10. Docket	A small number of naturalizations were assigned docket numbers in the Circuit Court. The docket numbers are indicated here.
11. Filmed	The Archives has a small number of original declarations and petitions on file. If the original declaration or petition remains, this field notes whether it has been filmed (F) or not (NF). No mark indicates there is no original document at the Archives.
12. Comments	Comments related to the filing.

The Naturalization Process

Taken from the Naturalization section of the National Archives website:

<http://www.archives.gov/research/naturalization/naturalization.html>

Introduction

Naturalization is the process by which an alien becomes an American citizen. It is a voluntary act; naturalization is not required. Of the foreign-born persons listed on the 1890 through 1930 censuses, 25 percent had **not** become naturalized or filed their "first papers."

This article is adapted from Claire Prechtel-Klusgens, "The Location of Naturalization Records," *The Record*, Vol. 3, No. 2, pp. 21-22 (Nov. 1996)

The Courts

From the first naturalization law passed by Congress in 1790 through much of the 20th century, an alien could become naturalized in any court of record. Thus, most people went to the court most convenient to them, usually a **county court**. The names and types of courts vary from State to State. The names and types of courts have also varied during different periods of history--but may include the county supreme, circuit, district, equity, chancery, probate, or common pleas court. Most researchers will find that their ancestors became naturalized in one of these courts. A few **State supreme courts** also naturalized aliens, such as the supreme courts of Indiana, Idaho, Iowa, Maine, New Jersey, and South Dakota. Aliens who lived in large cities sometimes became naturalized in a **Federal court**, such as a U.S. district court or U.S. circuit court.

General Rule: The Two-Step Process

Congress passed the first law regulating naturalization in 1790 (1 Stat. 103). As a general rule, naturalization was a two-step process that took a minimum of 5 years. After residing in the United States for 2 years, an alien could file a "*declaration of intent*" (so-called "first papers") to become a citizen. After 3 additional years, the alien could "*petition for naturalization*." After the petition was granted, a certificate of citizenship was issued to the alien. These two steps did not have to take place in the same court. As a general rule, the "declaration of intent" generally contains more genealogically useful information than the "petition." The "declaration" *may* include the alien's month and year (or possibly the exact date) of immigration into the United States.

Exceptions to the General Rule

Having stated this "two-step, 5-year" general rule, it is necessary to note several exceptions.

The **first major exception** was that "derivative" citizenship was granted to wives and minor children of naturalized men. From 1790 to 1922, wives of naturalized men automatically became citizens. This also meant that an alien woman who married a U.S. citizen automatically became a citizen. (Conversely, an American woman who married an alien lost her U.S. citizenship, even if she never left the United States.) From 1790 to 1940, children under the age of 21 automatically became naturalized citizens upon the naturalization of their father. Unfortunately, however, names and biographical information about wives and children are rarely included in declarations or petitions filed before September 1906.

The **second major exception** to the general rule was that, from 1824 to 1906, minor aliens who

had lived in the United States 5 years before their 23rd birthday could file both their declarations and petitions at the same time.

The **third major exception** to the general rule was the special consideration given to veterans. An 1862 law allowed honorably discharged Army veterans of any war to petition for naturalization--without previously having filed a declaration of intent--after only 1 year of residence in the United States. An 1894 law extended the same no-previous-declaration privilege to honorably discharged 5-year veterans of the Navy or Marine Corps. Over 192,000 aliens were naturalized between May 9, 1918, and June 30, 1919, under an act of May 9, 1918, that allowed aliens serving in the U.S. armed forces during "the present war" to file a petition for naturalization without making a declaration of intent or proving 5 years' residence. Laws enacted in 1919, 1926, 1940, and 1952 continued various preferential treatment provisions for veterans.

The Records

It is impossible to provide hard-and-fast rules about the content or even the existence of naturalization records. The 1905 *Report to the President of the Commission on Naturalization* remarked:

The methods of making and keeping the naturalization records in both the Federal and State courts are as various as the procedure in such cases. Thus the declaration of intention in some courts consists merely of the bare statement of the intention and the name and allegiance of the alien, while in other courts it also includes a history of the alien.... In a majority of courts alien applicants are not required to make the declaration of intention required by law ... and in other courts he is. Previous to 1903 a majority of courts did not require petitions or affidavits; other courts did. Some courts keep a naturalization record separate from the other records; other courts include the naturalization record in the regular minutes of the court. Some records contain full histories of the aliens, but a majority of the records show only the name, nationality, oath of allegiance, and date of admission.

In 1903 a Justice Department investigator made even more condemnatory comments:

I find the naturalization records in many cases in a chaotic condition, many lost and destroyed, and some sold for old paper. Most the records consist of merely the name and nativity of the alien with no means of identifying aliens of the same name.... In numerous cases I find aliens naturalized under initials instead of Christian names, surnames misspelled or changed entirely, and names of witnesses inserted in place of the alien naturalized.... The examination of the records discloses the remarkable fact that never, since the first enactment of the naturalization laws, has any record been made in any court of the names of minor children who, under the operation of the statutes, were made citizens by the naturalization of their parents.

- **The Location of these Records**

County Court Records

Naturalization records from county courts may still be at the county court, in a county or State archives, or at a regional archives serving several counties within a State. Some of these records or indexes have been published, such as the *Index of Naturalizations, Ashtabula County, Ohio, 1875-1906*, published by the Ashtabula County Genealogical

Society.

Do not be surprised if county court employees tell you that their naturalization records are at "the National Archives" or that their court never conducted naturalizations. Most current court employees are probably not genealogists and may not be familiar with the court's older records. It is up to the researcher to determine the location of older court records.

Federal Court Records

If the naturalization took place in a Federal court, naturalization indexes, declarations of intent, and petitions will usually be in the NARA [regional facility](#) serving the State in which the Federal court is located. Some of these indexes and records have been microfilmed.

The Microfilm Reading Room (Room 400) in the [National Archives Building](#), 700 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW, Washington, DC, has some microfilmed Federal court naturalization indexes, declarations, and petitions, but they do not form a complete collection of these records. For listings of naturalization indexes and records available as National Archives microfilm publications in Room 400, see listings for Record Group 21, Records of U.S. District Courts; Record Group 85, Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service; and Donated Materials in the National Archives in [Microfilm Resources for Research: A Comprehensive Catalog of National Archives Microfilm Publications](#) (Washington, DC: National Archives and Records Administration, 1996).

The Naturalization Process” on a following page for further explanation of this process).