

ALIEN REGISTRATION RECORDS – 1940-1944

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Not every immigrant who came to the United States applied for and received American citizenship. If your ancestor was alive in 1940 and did not become a U.S. citizen, you may find the alien registration records of 1940-1944 a useful alternative to the naturalization records.

In response to the threat of World War II, on June 28, 1940, Congress passed the Alien Registration Act of 1940, also known as the Smith Act. Beginning in the summer of 1940, all non-citizens 14 years of age and older were required to register at their local post office or Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) office. Immigrants arriving in the U. S. registered as they applied for admission.

Most resident aliens registered at their local post office between July and December 1940. They were fingerprinted and filled out the two-page Alien Registration Form (AR-2), to which was attached an additional card (AR-3). Each set of forms was serially numbered. The completed forms were forwarded to the INS for statistical coding, indexing and filing. Once the Alien Registration Form had been processed, the Alien Registration Receipt Card (AR-3) was detached and mailed to the registered alien to show he or she had complied with the law. Failure to comply was punishable by deportation.

These registration forms (July 1940- April 1944) are on microfilm in INS custody and are referred to as AR records. Some of the information found on the Alien Registration Form (AR-2) are: names; address; date and place of birth; marital status; physical description; port of entry; date of arrival; name of vessel; occupation and employer in 1940; membership or activities in clubs, organization and societies; military record; if filed for citizenship. The form is signed by the registrant and has a right fingerprint. The Alien Registration Receipt Card (AR-3) also has a right index fingerprint and the signature of the alien.

For more information about the Alien Registration Form and how to request copies, visit:

National Archives

<https://www.archives.gov/research/immigration/alien-registration-ar-2>

US Citizenship & Immigration Services

<https://www.uscis.gov/records/genealogy/historical-record-series/alien-registration-forms-on-microfilm-1940-1944>

Note: When completing the name of your ancestor, use the spelling of the time. For example, if the male last name ended in *-ski*, a female may have used *-ska*. If you knew your ancestor as John, there is a good possibility he came to the U.S. as Jan, Walter as Władysław, Katherine as Katarzyna, etc. Also remember that “Poland” did not exist from 1772 to 1918. Records prior to 1920 usually show the place of origin as Germany, Russia or Austria/Galicia.
