

20th Century Citizenship Laws Lead To Interesting Archival Finds

Seemingly straightforward laws regarding eligibility for citizenship led to some interesting interpretations by the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), the results of which can be seen in a variety of Federal records.

One such law is the Cable Act of 1922. The Act reversed in part previous legislation that held that women derived their status from that of their husbands'. However, it left in place a provision that female citizens who married alien men racially ineligible for naturalization lost their U.S. citizenship. Repatriation petitions document the efforts of women to regain citizenship lost while the Chinese Exclusion Act Case Files contain files of former citizens who found themselves treated as aliens due to marriage.

Until 1943, various laws banned Asians from receiving naturalized citizenship but did not define "Asian." The records of the U.S. District Courts document a number of cases in which a person denied citizenship on the basis of racial ineligibility argue the law did not apply to them. Two such cases are U.S. v Cartozian and U.S. v. Bhagat Singh Thind

We will explore each of these situations using records found in the holdings of the National Archives at Seattle.

Sue Karren National Archives, Seattle.