

Bay Area immigration records, destined for dustbin, will be released **Tuesday**

San Jose Mercury News (California)

May 17, 2012 Thursday

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Section: SPECIAL REPORTS; News

Length: 450 words

Byline: By Matt O'Brien **Bay Area** News Group

Body

Tens of thousands of old West Coast **immigration records** the government once sought to throw away **will** instead become publicly available on **Tuesday** at a **Bay Area** archive.

Photographs, letters, health **records**, interview transcripts and other historical documents were **destined** for a recycling bin or a remote Midwestern storage facility.

"We changed that plan. We're making them permanent," said spokeswoman Sharon Rummery of U.S. **Immigration** and Citizenship Services.

Archivists credit the advocacy of the late U.S. Rep. Tom Lantos, D-San Mateo, and his successor, Rep. Jackie Speier, D-San Mateo, for helping to save the collection.

The documents **will** be housed at the San Francisco National Archives in San Bruno and open to the public beginning **Tuesday**.

The lawmakers argued that the Alien Files, known as the A-Files, should be made permanent **records** of "enduring historical value."

The files are for people from more than 100 countries who arrived, legally or not, on American shores, including many affected by laws excluding Chinese immigrants in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The Chinese Exclusion Act files were already housed in the archives, but the new collection includes supplemental documents.

The roughly 40,000 files in San Bruno's new collection are specifically for immigrants or foreign visitors who were processed by **immigration** agents in San Francisco, Reno, Honolulu or Guam. Only pre-1910 files are currently available, but others **will** be **released** later. Another 300,000 files for the rest of the country are housed in Kansas City.

Kept for more than a century in local **immigration** offices, officials deliberated for years about what to do with the documents until the decision in 2009 to keep them.

Immigration officials originally planned to discard each file 75 years after it was inactive, such as after someone became a citizen, died or was deported, said Marisa Louie, of the National Archives.

"No files were disposed that we know of, but they had those deadlines looming over their head," she said.

This is the second major archival data trove coming to **Bay Area** genealogists and researchers this year. Millions of personal **records** from the 1940 census became available last month.

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How to SEE the 'A-Files'

Thousands of old **immigration records** from the so-called Alien Files, or A-Files, **will** be open to the public **Tuesday** at the San Francisco National Archives, 1000 Commodore Drive, San Bruno.

Archivists suggest emailing them atafiles.sanbruno@nara.gov or calling 650-238-3501 before traveling there.

By the end of the month, the National Archives **will** launch a name-based online index to help search for the **records** at its website: www.archives.gov/pacific/san-francisco.

Graphic

One of the documents that are part of the Alien files, otherwise known as the A-Files, are now part of the National Archives at San Francisco in San Bruno, Calif. Thursday, May 17, 2012 and **will** be available to the public beginning **Tuesday**. The roughly 40,000 files in San Bruno's new collection are specifically for immigrants or foreign visitors who were processed by **immigration** agents in San Francisco, Reno, Honolulu or Guam. Only pre-1910 files are currently available, but others **will** be **released** later. (Courtesy of the National Archives at San Francisco)

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Classification

Language: ENGLISH

Publication-Type: Newspaper

Subject: **IMMIGRATION** (92%); CITIZENSHIP (90%); US TERRITORIES (78%); US CONGRESS (76%); MEDICAL **RECORDS** (73%); INTERVIEWS (72%); GENEALOGY (72%); TRANSCRIPTS (57%)

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Industry: ARCHIVE COLLECTIONS (90%); MEDICAL RECORDS (73%); INTERNATIONAL TOURISM (65%)

Person: TOM LANTOS (55%); JACKIE SPEIER (55%)

Geographic: SAN FRANCISCO BAY AREA, CA, USA (90%); HONOLULU, HI, USA (79%); MISSOURI, USA (79%); CALIFORNIA, USA (79%); MIDWEST USA (79%); UNITED STATES (79%)

Load-Date: May 19, 2012

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