

# Perspectives

## Urgent response needed to keep records of the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services accessible

Since the Nichi Bei Foundation launched the Nikkei Angel Island Pilgrimage in 2014, and the pilgrimage to the former Wakamatsu Tea and Silk Farm Colony site in 2017, we have helped bring more than 1,700 people to the Immigration Station at Angel Island, and some 400 to the Wakamatsu Colony site. A large part of these pilgrimages have been helping to get the community reconnected to their family histories, primarily through our partnership with the California Genealogical Society, whose volunteers helped to consult hundreds of pilgrims, getting them reconnected to their family legacies.

However, there is a serious potential roadblock to that process, one that you can help to prevent.

Record accessibility is key for anyone researching their family history. Birth, marriage, and death records typically name the parents and are key to proving lineage necessary for *koseki* retrieval. Wartime detention camp records (available at the National Archives) help tell the full story of the incarceration of family members. Census records contain a wealth of information including relationships between family members, ages, address of the family, and occupations. Passenger records provide information about immigration and sometimes offer clues about the family in Japan, such as next-of-kin or the ancestral address. Each document is a piece of evidence which helps to complete your family history puzzle. Unfortunately, when records are restricted, or the cost is inaccessible, the story is incomplete.

The records of the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services' genealogy program is at risk of a proposed 492 percent increase. If successful, these documents (including A-Files, Alien Registration Forms, C-Files, Registry Files, and Visa Files) will be virtually inaccessible due to cost. The fees will prevent most researchers, family historians, filmmakers, authors, and scholars from accessing critical documents. In 2017, the fees went from \$20 and \$35 to \$65. The proposed non-refundable fees for 2020

begin at \$240 and go up to \$625 for a single file, even if no record can be found. This is an expense beyond the means of most of us.

The files held by USCIS pertain primarily to late-19th and 20th century immigrants. The majority of Asian immigrants arrived within this time frame, so this proposed price increase disproportionately impacts those of us researching Asian Americans. For *Nikkei*, the A-Files and Alien Registration Forms can contain critical biographical data not found in other locations. In the case of Raymond Hiroshi Hirai, his A-file contains the only photographs of him, never seen by his family.

NOW is the time to make your voice be heard! The Nichi Bei Foundation board urges you to submit comments to the Federal Rulemaking Portal today! Learn more about this proposal and what you can do about it at <https://www.recordsnotrevenue.com>.

There is a very limited amount of time for the public to express their outrage. Comments must be submitted to USCIS by Dec. 16, 2019.

So what can you do?

Please send your comments before Dec. 16 2019 to the Federal Rulemaking Portal (<https://www.regulations.gov/document?D=USCIS-2019-0010-0001>) and refer to DHS Docket No. USCIS-2019-0010 and follow the instructions for submitting comments. Additionally, please send a copy of your comments to your U.S. senators and representatives, and refer to DHS Docket No. USCIS-2019-0010. Tell them you care about preserving access to federal records.

For more information on record accessibility, visit either [RecordsNotRevenue.com](https://www.RecordsNotRevenue.com) and [ReclaimTheRecords.com](https://www.ReclaimTheRecords.com). These are the records of the people. Don't let our records become inaccessible.

Sincerely,

**Nichi Bei Foundation  
Board of Directors**