



PASSPORT RECORDS

The following are answers to some frequently asked question about passport-related records.

1. Are the actual passports carried by individuals preserved in the National Archives?

Passports are issued by the Department of State and sent to the bearer. While a passport remains the property of the U.S. Government, it is usually retained by the person to whom it is issued and not returned to government possession. While the National Archives holds a few original passports as exemplars, the passports carried by individuals generally are not preserved. The National Archives does, however, hold the applications for passports dating to March 1925.

2. How do I get a copy of a passport application preserved in the National Archives?

As part of its on-going commitment to preserve the records, the National Archives has entered into partnerships with several commercial entities to digitize and make available selected NARA holdings. The passport application files in the National Archives (which date only to March 1925) are now searchable and available in digital form and can be viewed online via multiple commercial vendors. There may be a cost to use that resource. You may, however, view these records online at one of NARA's facilities at no cost. For the nearest NARA location, please consult our web page at <http://www.archives.gov/locations/>.

If you do not locate a passport application in the online resource, the person(s) in whom you are interested likely did not apply for one. While passports were required for overseas travel for a short period during the Civil War (August 1861-March 1862) and during the World War I era (December 1915-1921), during much of the period for which the National Archives holds applications, passports were not required. The existing requirement for U.S. citizens traveling abroad to have a passport dates from June 1941.

3. How do I request a better copy of the passport photograph that is part of the application that is found online?

The National Archives can provide a better copy than is found online of the passport application photograph associated with each application. In order to locate that photograph, the following information is required: name of person,

date of birth, and passport application number. Send your request to the Archives II Reference, Research Rooms and Augmented Processing Branch <archives2reference@nara.gov>.

4. How do I request a copy of a passport application dating from March 1925 and later that remains in the custody of the Department of State?

Passport applications dating from March 1925 and later remain in the legal custody of the Department of State.

- To request access to applications for genealogical or historical research, you must submit a Freedom of Information Act request to: U.S. Department of State, Office of Law Enforcement Liaison, FOIA Officer, 44132 Mercure Cir, P.O. Box 1227, Sterling, VA, 20166.

- The requirements to request your own records or records of your minor child, any person for whom you are a legal guardian, or any person who has authorized you to obtain them are strict. Please see the guidance at <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/passports/have-passport/passport-records.html>.

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