



Court Historical Society **NEWSLETTER** *Eastern District of Tennessee*

JANUARY 2017

Naturalization and the Courts

Naturalization ceremonies have long been held in the federal courts, but the courts have little to do with immigration matters today, other than these ceremonies.

It hasn't always been that way, however. Until 1991, those wishing to become American citizens could get their application papers from federal district courts. Along with the application papers, we in the Eastern District of Tennessee gave applicants an 85-page manual--a book about the size of a "Reader's Digest" magazine--which was provided to us by the Daughters of the American Revolution organization.

The manual, titled "DAR Manual for Citizenship," is complete enough to serve as a civics class textbook. It is published as a public service by the National Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution. A supply of the manuals was regularly provided to our court, and likely to most other federal courts, to give to prospective American citizens to help them learn about our government. The DAR also distributed the manual to schools and other institutions.

In its initial publishing of the manual in 1921, the DAR organization had a goal similar to the one that Tennessee legislators had in mind last year when they passed a law that went into effect this year requiring high school students to take a civics test--that goal being to enhance one's knowledge of American government.

In proposing the publication of the manual, the DAR President General at that time made her recommendation to the DAR National Board in interesting words, which follow:

The time has come when the National Society ... must go forward with some big, concrete work in which we may all unite to establish better relations with these strangers within our gates, that the spirit of America may enter into their hearts.

It has seemed to me that this can best be done on the coming steamers and at the points of debarkation, such as Ellis Island, where the immigrants are received like commodities, tagged and labelled and shunted off to their

various destinations.

If the spoken and the written word of welcome could be the first thing that greets these desolate, homesick ones--a friendly hand, holding out a book of needed, helpful information--how differently, how warmly would they feel toward this land and its people.

She proposed that the manual be printed in several languages and distributed to "the immigrant landing upon these shores" and that it contain a copy of the Constitution of the United States, the American Creed, the Pledge of Allegiance, with rules for the correct use of the flag, "and all practical information concerning our laws and government; our schools, including night schools; libraries, banks, government securities, everything, in short, which he needs to know in order to lead the life of a law-abiding American citizen."

For a number of years, the manual was published in 19 languages and in Braille. Our court has had tucked away in its files for years eight copies of the manual from 1948, 1949, and 1950 that are printed in both a foreign language and in English--two languages in each of the books. The other languages in our books are Armenian, Swedish (two copies), Finnish, Norwegian, Czechoslovak (two copies), and Hungarian.

Although a number of public libraries across the country have copies of the two-language manuals, it is likely that very few courts have in their custody similar copies, adding a little strength to the notion that the Court Historical Society's large, indexed collection of documents and memorabilia is one of the more extensive collections held by any district court.

In 1959, the DAR stopped printing the manual in a language other than English. According to DAR headquarters in Washington, it did so at the request of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, as the agency was known then.

"The Department felt that a prospective citizen should learn what he had to know in the language he would be using," according to correspondence in the DAR archives.

By 2005, the DAR stopped publishing the manual in print form "pending review and constant changes in the immigration law." However, the manual is available online.

How the Courts Became Involved

The judges of the Eastern District of Tennessee have always said that conducting naturalization ceremonies is one of the more enjoyable aspects of their judicial duties. But how did the courts become involved in the naturalization process?

Federal naturalization laws have existed since 1790, but naturalization ceremonies, as we know them today, didn't begin until 1906, following passage of the Basic Naturalization Act in June of that year. Section 6 of the Act provided, among other things, that all final hearings (naturalization ceremonies) would "be had only on stated days, to be fixed by the rule of the court," according to a spokesman in the U.S. Citizenship & Immigration Services History Library.

"In this way, groups of people came to be routinely naturalized on the same day, and the public became more aware of the naturalization process," the spokesman said.

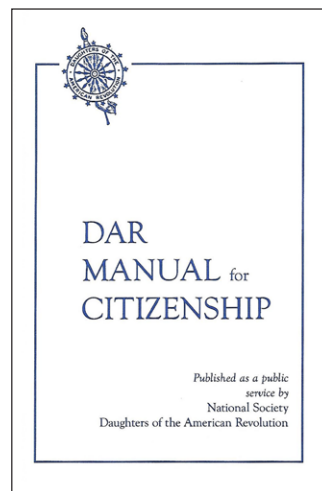
In 1940, Congress passed a joint resolution requiring the federal judiciary "to dignify and emphasize the significance of citizenship," and the ceremonies became a regular part of the function of the federal courts.

Today, the court's only involvement with foreigners becoming American citizens is working with the CIS in scheduling and conducting ceremonies for those applicants that the CIS presents as having met the requirements for citizenship.

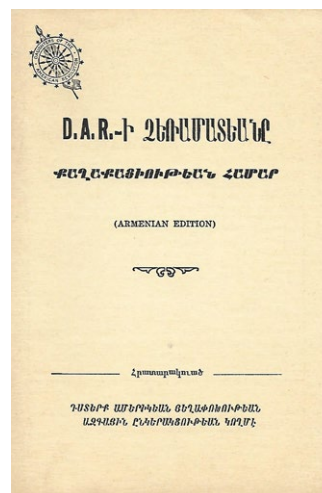
The CIS notifies those applicants of the court date and ceremony time, and then a CIS representative travels, usually from the CIS office in Nashville, to the court site--in the Eastern District of Tennessee that's Knoxville, Chattanooga, and Greeneville--and a judge conducts a ceremony, which lasts about 45 minutes.

While the DAR Citizenship Manual doesn't figure into today's naturalization process (unless the applicants pursue it online), the DAR itself does. Members of one or more of the local DAR chapters have for years attended the naturalization ceremonies to greet the new citizens and give them small American flags and a flyer about the flag.

[EDITOR'S NOTE--The Immigration Act of 1990, which went into effect in October 1991, placed the sole authority to naturalize new citizens under the Attorney General (the Executive Branch), but each district court could choose to continue conducting naturalization ceremonies if the judges of the court elected to do so, which our court did.



1993 edition (In English only)



1948 Armenian edition (Note "D.A.R." in the title)

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