

What did Refugees Need to Obtain a US Visa in the 1930s?

As the Nazi regime's attacks intensified in the late 1930s, hundreds of thousands of Jews in Germany tried to immigrate to the United States. To enter the United States, each person needed an immigration visa stamped into his or her passport.

It was difficult to get the necessary papers to leave Germany, and US immigration visas were difficult to obtain. The process could take years.



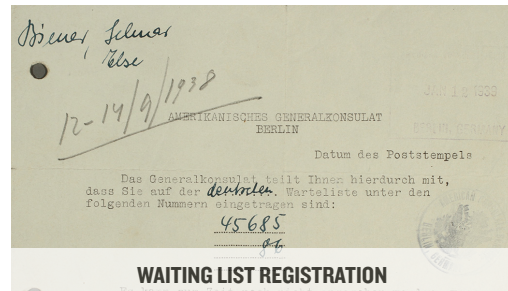
EXPLORE THE SEVEN STEPS THAT WERE REQUIRED FOR THOSE SEEKING TO IMMIGRATE TO THE UNITED STATES.

STEP 1

1 Register for the Waiting List

Between 1938-1941, US law allowed only 27,370 immigration visas per year to be issued to people born in Germany or Austria. If you wanted to present your paperwork and be interviewed by the US consulate in the hope of getting a visa, you needed to register and join the waiting list.

By 1938, you could expect to wait for at least two years for a visa.



2 Gather Documents

While on the waiting list, you would gather all the documents you needed in order to be ready when your turn came up. You had to go to many different government offices and often pay fees to obtain these documents.

Some had expiration dates and you might have to renew them more than once.

Form No. 533
American Consulate - No. 3796
AT STUTTGART, GERMANY.

APPLICATION FOR IMMIGRATION VISA (QUOTA)

I, the undersigned APPLICANT FOR AN IMMIGRATION VISA, being duly sworn, state that my full and true name is Roberta Alice Ollendorf Stern; that I am 48 years of age, of the female sex and Hebrew race; that I was born on the 10th day of November 1891 at Frankfurt M. Germany; that for 5 years immediately preceding this application I have resided at the following places, during the periods stated, to wit:
Frankfurt M. Germany
Koernerstrasse 5.

That I am (married) (single) (widow) (divorced) to Ludwig Stern, who was born at Federboth, Germany and resides at London, England.

That the names, dates of birth, and places of residence of my minor children are:
Helmut Stern August 31, 1921 London, England.

VISA APPLICATION

1 Grund
Nummer 00501004

Geburtschein

50kreuzer
Stempelmarke Ich Entesgefertiger bestätige hiermit, dass nach Inhalt der Geburtsmatrik Band IV Fol. 83 dem Herrn Samuel Federmann aus Libochovic, Buchhalter zu Deutschbrod, Sohn der Eheleute Salomon und Anna Federmann, von seiner Gattin Josefine Federmann Tochter der Eheleute Michael und Judith Spitz, unter Geistand der Hebaume Marie Lauer aus Deutschbrod am 2. Mai 1893 (neuntzigdre) zu Deutschbrod Nr. 110 eine eheliche Tochter geboren und derselben der Name Amalie Stern wobei Amalie Stern

BIRTH CERTIFICATE

STEUERAMTSTATION
Römerstrasse 10
Kassenzeichen

18. AUG. 1938
(Ort und Datum)

Steuertliche Unbedenklichkeitsbescheinigung
Gegen die Ausreise der(r) Maria Weissmann, Besatzdritte
(Beruf oder Stand, Vor- und Zunahme)
geboren am 9. 12. 1893 in Wien, Oesterreich
und seiner Ehefrau geborene geboren am geborene

TAX DOCUMENT

Dr. med. H. Berberich
Telefon 4507

Zum zügl. Behandlung unentgeltlich von
Inden genehmigt Augsburg, den 6. XI. 38

Bescheinigung.
Johanne Lindemann, geb. 30. VII. 21, wohnhaft Augsburg, Hermannstr. 3, wurde von mir heute untersucht.
Sie ist körperlich und geistig gesund und frei von übertragbaren Krankheiten.

H. Berberich

MEDICAL CLEARANCE

Vollzeipräsident
II 20° / 35.
Berlin, am 15. September 1938

Führungszeugnis
Dem Herrn Leopold Sternhardt
am 5. September 1938 zu Wien, Kreis Wien
geboren, wird amtlich bescheinigt, daß er - er - in der Zeit
vom 1. Oktober 1905 bis jetzt

POLICE CERTIFICATE

Entlassungsschein
Dienstgrad: 2. Off.
Vor- u. Nachname: Franz Heersberg
Einsatz-Teil: 4. Feldart. Reg. N.
Gemeindeg. Ort: 17. P. 92. St. Frankfurt M.
Entlassen am: 2. 12. 17 nach: St. 17
Bemerkungen: Stilles Dispositionsbuch

MILITARY DISCHARGE

Inventaraufstellung
1 Klavier
1 Kommode mit Aufsatz
1 " " Schublade
1 Bank
5 Sessel
1 Tisch
1 Letterbett
1 Nähmaschine
8 Sofakissen
3 Decken

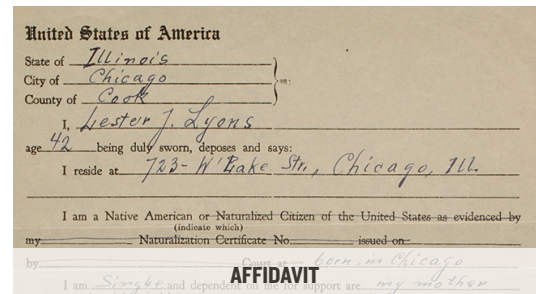
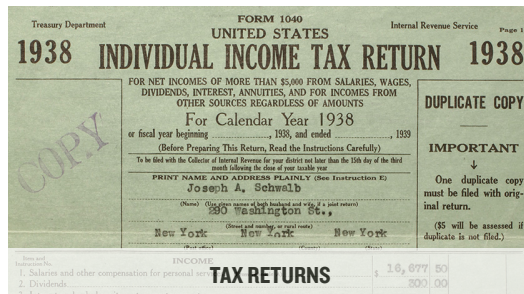
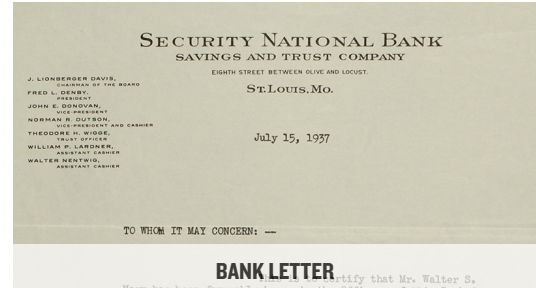
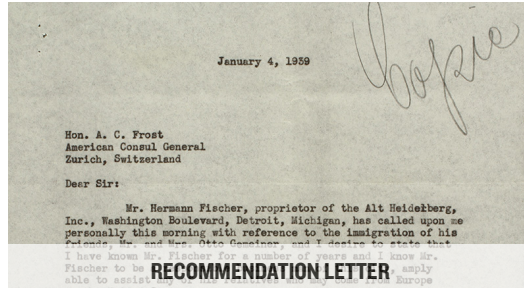
1 Puppensteppdecke
Diverse Stoffreste
1 Badetuch
1 Kinderbademantel
11 Federpolster
1 Rosshaar "
5 Federtuchenten
2 Steppdecken
2 Plaisierstühlen

INVENTORY LIST

3 Find American Financial Sponsor

You also needed to find an American financial sponsor, preferably a relative, since Nazi Germany only allowed Jews to immigrate with a small amount of money and property. That person had to collect and send documents promising to take responsibility for you after you arrived in the United States. You would likely be able to communicate with them only by sending letters, which could take weeks to arrive.

After September 1940, the US government required two sponsors.



4 Buy a Ship Ticket

You needed to prove you had booked passage out of Europe. Travel became very difficult after World War II began in September 1939—with ports closing down and German submarines attacking ships in the Atlantic Ocean.

Tickets were expensive, costing the modern-day equivalent of thousands of dollars.



5 Collect Transit Visas

You had to obtain stamps in your passport from all the countries you would need to travel through to get to the ship's port of departure. These stamps needed to be collected in a specific order, and each cost money.

One mistake could send you back to the same government office many times.



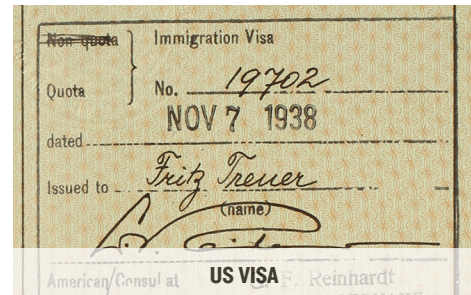
6 Interview with the American Consulate

When your turn came up from the waiting list, you would be called to the US consulate for an interview. The State Department official would carefully read all of your paperwork to make sure you were financially stable, healthy, and would not be a threat to US national security.

State Department officials often rejected applicants for economic or national security reasons, or told them to return later with more documents. Many documents and transit stamps had expiration dates, so errors could set you back months and cost a lot of money.

7 Acquire Visa and Journey to the United States

If you passed, the official would stamp a visa in your passport. You would fill one of the 27,370 quota slots available to potential immigrants that year.



LONG ODDS

Immigrating to the United States was a complicated, expensive process even under the best of circumstances. Hundreds of thousands of people, most of them Jewish refugees, applied at American consulates in Europe but were unable to immigrate. Many of them became trapped in Nazi-occupied territory and were murdered in the Holocaust.

GO TO NEXT SECTION: IMMIGRATION BY THE NUMBERS



100 Raoul Wallenberg Place, SW
Washington, DC 20024-2126
Main telephone: 202.488.0400
TTY: 202.488.0406

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