

Jewish Refugee Rescue in the Philippines, 1937-1941

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Abstract

This paper highlights a few aspects of the remarkable story of how one small Asian country managed to do what so many more capable nations of the world were reluctant to do – save Jewish lives. It is remarkable because they managed to circumvent the inclination of U.S. State Department officials’ propensity to obstruct Jewish rescue and they more than quadrupled the population of the Philippine Jewish community in the process. By offering a haven for 1,301 refugees, the Philippine rescuers saved them from the fate of the six million Jews who were murdered in the Holocaust.

Keywords: Jewish refugee rescue, Philippines, U.S. State Department, Paul V. McNutt, Pres. Manuel Quezon

Prologue – US Immigration Policies, 1920 – 1945

The United States’ Immigration Acts of 1917 and 1924 became the dual directives of immigration policies of the U.S. during the first

half of the 20th century. However, only the Immigration Act of 1917, which outlined “qualitative” restrictions on potential immigrants, applied to the Philippines during its eras as a territory and then as a commonwealth nation of the United States. This 1917 Act imposed numerous conditions excluding individuals as acceptable immigrants to the U.S., and by extension, to the Philippines. While the U.S. State Department supposedly could not restrict the numbers of Jewish immigrants coming into the Philippines, it could, and did, demand a process that ensured adequate financial support for the refugees. This becomes more apparent when we contextualize refugee rescue in the Philippines within the discriminatory U.S. immigration laws enacted in the 1920s that restricted immigration “quantitatively” via quota restrictions. Between 1937 and 1941, refugee rescuers in the Commonwealth of the Philippines organized selection and sponsorship programs unlike any Jewish rescue operations executed anywhere else in the world during the years of Nazi persecution in Europe. This paper outlines how these rescuers overcame U.S. State Department interference and successfully saved over 1300 refugees from Europe’s impending Holocaust.¹

Understanding the full significance of these rescue plans requires a basic understanding of the colonial relationship of the Philippines to the United States during the first three decades of the 20th century. As a territory acquired by the U.S. in its victory over Spain in 1898, the Philippines became an American colonial holding in East Asia, subject to both domestic and foreign regulations imposed by its imperial overlord. While the opening section of the 1917 Immigration Act details that its provisions “shall be enforced in the Philippine Islands by officers of the general government,” no such directive appears in the text of the U.S. Immigration Act of 1924 that regulated immigration numerically into the United States with the imposition of immigration quotas.² This is extremely important when discussing the rescue of refugee Jews in the Philippines, as the qualitative nature of the refugee immigration came under scrutiny by virtue of the 1917 Act alone. However, no number restrictions on immigration into the Philippines existed in U.S. Immigration Laws, as was prescribed for immigration into the United States by the Acts of 1921 and 1924. Such numeric restrictions on immigration to the Philippines did not become law until the Commonwealth passed their own immigration

regulations in 1940. Thus, at the height of the Jewish refugee rescue in the Philippines from 1937 to 1940, restrictive quotas did not apply. But perhaps even more importantly, neither did U.S. State Department nor consular oversight in approving the issuance of visas to refugee aliens immigrating to the Philippines. Jewish refugee rescue in the Philippines had actually been in operation months before the U.S. State Department even became informed.

Pre-Selection Rescue, 1937-1938

The first significant arrival of European refugee Jews into Manila did not come directly from Europe, but rather from the Jewish refugee community in Shanghai, the only port city in the world until August 1939 that did not require visas for entrance. By 1937, several hundred German and Austrian Jews had arrived in Shanghai since the 1933 Nazi take-over in Germany. That number would exponentially explode to over 17,000 by the end of 1939.³ With the renewal of hostilities between the Japanese and Chinese in 1937, which resulted in the occupation of Peking by Japanese forces, the four million inhabitants of Shanghai faced the dangers of war in an occupied territory, and various civilian communities sought escape from Shanghai's battle grounds.⁴ Germany's shift of alliance from China to Japan at this time alarmed German Jews in Shanghai, who feared German pressure on Japan to adopt Nazi discriminatory policies against Shanghai's Jewish German population. The Manila Jewish community feared for them as well, and the Jewish Refugee Committee of Manila (JRC), comprised of influential and affluent U.S. members of the Jewish community, formed with the intention of rescuing German Jews of the Shanghai Jewish community. These Jews had already been deprived of their German citizenship, and the Gestapo presence that was taking root in Japanese areas threatened their existence in Shanghai as well.

At the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War broke on 7 July 1937, the JRC in Manila received a telegram from the Ashkenazi⁵ Jewish community in Shanghai asking for assistance for their refugee Jews. The small Jewish community in Manila immediately raised a sum of \$8,000, but before the money could be dispatched, the wealthier Sephardic Jews of Shanghai stepped up and cared for the needs of the

Shanghai's Ashkenazi refugees Jews on their own. The JRC, under the leadership of Philip Frieder and Morton I. Netzorg in Manila, decided to hold the funds in escrow in case a future need arose. That need came almost immediately.

In August 1937, the German government sent its passenger liner the "*Gneisenau*" to Shanghai to remove all German nationals from the war zone. In so doing they also took aboard about 30 Jewish German refugee families, offering them "a free trip to Manila as guests of the German Reich."⁶ All of these German nationals, including the refugees, were deposited in Manila and the German government signed an agreement with Philippine Commonwealth officials to the effect that these people removed from the war zone would not become public charges of Philippine society. At that time the German Consul in the Philippines suggested that the Jewish community in Manila take charge of the Jewish German refugees from Shanghai. This suggestion was adopted and the refugees were placed in various Jewish homes and eventually jobs found for all of them.⁷ This rescue of Shanghai's Jewish German refugees, observant of U.S. immigration directives that enforced the exclusion clause regarding refugees not becoming public charges, set the precedent for the later immigration program in Manila that involved efforts to selectively rescue victims from Europe's Jewish communities.⁸

Rescue by Selection: Origins, 1938

The rescue of these German Jews from Shanghai came to the attention of the Refugee Economic Corporation (REC), headquartered in New York City and an affiliate of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee.⁹ Incorporated in 1934, the REC, originally called the Refugee Rehabilitation Committee,¹⁰ specialized in funding Jewish settlements in countries that agreed to take in refugee Jews.¹¹ Exactly how the plan to initiate further rescue in the Philippines was conceived has become shrouded in legend over the last seventy years. Stories credit Pres. Manuel L. Quezon for initiating the offer, others claim U.S. High Commissioner Paul V. McNutt devised the plan, and still others place members of the Jewish Refugee Committee (REC) in Manila at a poker table with Eisenhower, Quezon, McNutt, and Frieder, where these gambling

buddies hashed out the plan while indulging in fine cigars rolled by S. Frieder & Sons Manufacturing.¹² But according to the documentary record, once the REC became aware that the Philippines had taken in Jewish refugees from Shanghai, correspondence between the real initiators began: Charles Liebman and Bruno Schachner of the REC in New York; Paul V. McNutt, the U.S. High Commissioner for the Philippine Islands; Philip Frieder and his brothers, of the successful Jewish merchant family in the Philippines and directors of the Jewish Refugee Committee in Manila; Manuel Luis Quezon y Molina, President of the Commonwealth of the Philippines; and J. C. Hyman of the New York-based American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC).¹³

After hearing that German Jews had found safe haven in Manila, Liebman of the REC initiated contact with U.S. High Commissioner McNutt through mutual acquaintances with two brothers, Julius and Jacob Weiss, the former an associate with the REC and the latter an Indiana State Senator and personal friend of McNutt.¹⁴ Senator Weiss wrote McNutt on behalf of the REC, asking if it were possible to allow 100 Jewish German refugee families to settle in the Philippines. McNutt replied that he would talk to Weiss in a few weeks when he, McNutt, returned to the U.S. McNutt arrived in Washington DC on 23 February 1938 and remained in the U.S. for two months before returning to the Philippines.¹⁵ After meetings with the President, the Secretary of State, and a dozen other important government officials, McNutt informed Weiss that “it’s all arranged. The visas will be okayed by me and won’t have to clear through the State Department. When I get back to Manila I’m going to arrange for the proper reception of these refugees.”¹⁶ Upon his return to the Philippines, McNutt “organized the Jewish community in Manila” and sent details of a selection plan in a letter to Weiss.¹⁷

When McNutt returned to the Philippines in April 1938, he convened meetings with leaders of the Jewish Community in Manila. In the communiqué of 19 May 1938, from McNutt to Weiss, McNutt stated that “I find that the Commonwealth officials [certainly referring to President Quezon] are quite sympathetic to the idea of receiving those who can be absorbed. With the foregoing in mind I asked a representative committee of Jewish leaders to prepare

a list of those who might be absorbed at the present time.”¹⁸ From this we know that meetings had already transpired with McNutt, President Quezon and members of the JRC prior to mid-May 1938 to devise a program of selection to bring German refugee Jews to the Philippines. The importance of McNutt’s role in this selection program cannot be overstated. Without his initiation of the dialog between the Philippine Government, the U.S. State Department, the Jewish Community in Manila, and the American Jewish relief organizations, it is doubtful this plan would have ever germinated.

In the aforementioned 19 May 1938 letter from McNutt to Weiss, we learn that McNutt understood that the Immigration Quota Act of 1924 did not apply to the Philippines when he requested that members of the JRC in Manila present him with “a list of those who might be absorbed” into the current Philippine economy.¹⁹ The leaders of the Jewish community in Manila composed and sent to McNutt a list of needed professionals who could be immediately absorbed economically into the community. McNutt included the list in his communiqué with Weiss, detailing various professions and skills that would require about “one hundred families” to fill.²⁰ McNutt stated that he was “deeply interested in the solution of the problem of caring for political refugees and . . . anxious to have any experiment in the Philippine Islands succeed. I should be very glad to do anything in my power to assist in handling these matters.”²¹ McNutt’s magnanimous position reflected a genuine altruistic attitude, and whether or not he felt it would serve some political or economic exigency, his involvement was crucial. But the success of the selection plan hung on other contingencies as well, such as the cooperation of the U.S. State Department and consular offices abroad in the issuance of visas to the Philippines.

Rescue by Selection and the U.S. Department of State, 1938-1940

Once received, Julius Weiss immediately shared his 19 May 1938 communiqué from McNutt with Bruno Schachner, assistant secretary of the REC, who penned a letter to the *Hilfsverein der Juden in Deutschland* (Relief Association for Jews in Germany) in Berlin on 1 June 1938, eliciting their help in selecting candidates in a rescue plan for refugee immigration to the Philippines:

Gentlemen:

We are informed by the United States High Commissioner for the Philippine Islands, who is turn bases his opinion on information furnished him by leaders of the local Jewish community, that there could be absorbed in the Philippine Islands, within a relatively short time, the following persons:

20 Physicians, among whom should be one eye, ear, nose and throat specialist, one skin specialist, and one or two surgeons.

10 Chemical Engineers

25 Registered Nurses

5 Dentists, who should have their own equipment

2 Ortho-Dentists

4 Oculists

10 Auto Mechanics

5 Cigar and Tobacco Experts

5 Women Dressmakers, stylists

5 Barbers – men and women

5 Accountants

5 Film and Photograph Experts

1 Rabbi, not over forty years of age, conservative, married and able to speak English.

20 Farmers

We are trying to organize the immigration of these people, and we should be indebted to you if you could meanwhile prepare a preliminary list of people meeting the requirements outlined above. As soon as we have completed arrangements, we will proceed with a final selection. Please let us know, meanwhile, whether all the various classes of persons could be found among the people registered with you, and if not, which ones are lacking. In view of the delicacy of the negotiations involved, we expect you to keep this matter entirely confidential, and under no circumstances to give it any publicity whatsoever. In addition, we would appreciate it if you would not approach the United States High Commissioner on your own behalf, in order not to confuse him by a variety of inquiries.²²

The Hilfsverein began assembling applicant names immediately and in spite of an international resolve “to keep this matter entirely confidential,” word spread rapidly of a rescue opportunity in the Philippines.

In correspondence from Charles Liebman, president of the REC, to McNutt on 10 June 1938, Liebman assured McNutt that no plans for sending the selected immigrants to the Philippines would be made until their total economic assimilation in the community could be guaranteed.²³ Liebman reminded McNutt of Germany’s emigration policies restricting the amount of assets that Jews could take out of the country and how it would be necessary for “outside agencies ... [to] care for them for an initial period” until they could become self-supporting.²⁴ Liebman asked McNutt for an estimate “as to how much money would be required to support a person or a family at a subsistence level, and how long the period of adjustment [was] likely to last.” Liebman finished his letter to McNutt with a sincere appreciation for McNutt’s generosity and interest in the “fate of refugees.”²⁵ In a return communiqué dated 24 June 1938, McNutt informed Liebman that subsistence for a single person for a seventy-five day period amounted to about \$50.00; \$75.00 for a family of two; and about \$90.00 for a family of three.²⁶ He further advised Liebman that all future contact regarding the rescue of refugees by this plan could be directed personally to Philip Frieder of the Jewish Community in Manila.²⁷

Various agencies worked to put the selection program into play. For McNutt and Quezon, it was vital that entrance into the Philippines follow a controlled, organized plan so that indiscriminate immigration would not overload the community and scuttle the plan. With financial support promised by the REC for the needs of selected immigrants to the Philippines, another contingency needed to be dealt with, namely how to obtain visas for the immigrants.

Had the State Department been fully aware of McNutt’s plans to facilitate rescue of refugee Jews in the Philippines when McNutt was in Washington D.C. in February 1938? Communiqués from the State Department to McNutt in July 1938 suggest not. McNutt received a radiogram from the Department of State dated 13 July 1938 stating:

“Have been informally advised emergency entry into the Philippines of several hundred Jewish refugees from Europe being arranged. Please radio all information available.”²⁸ Apparently, having heard through the grape-vine of intended rescue in the Philippines, the U.S. State Department sought a more official statement. McNutt answered that forty Jewish refugee families had already been successfully absorbed and “arrangements have been made to take one hundred additional families of approved professions and vocations in three groups at intervals [of] sixty days. If this experiment is successful it may be possible to absorb others.”²⁹ The reaction of the State Department can best be understood by examining an episode in early September 1938, which suggests that the State Department was not completely supportive of the Philippine immigration plans.

U.S. Secretary of State Cordell Hull received a telegram dated 6 September 1938 from the American Consul in Milan, Italy inquiring about immigration for five hundred non-Italian refugee Jews to the Philippines. Hull then dispatched a communiqué concerning these refugees to McNutt on 12 September 1938, requesting that McNutt inform the Commonwealth Government in strict confidence that the American Consul General in Milan proposed to have five hundred non-Italian Jews obtain visas and proceed immediately to the Philippines. Hull remarked that “information from other sources indicates the possibility of a movement from Central Europe to the Philippine Islands.”³⁰ Apparently alarmed by such an event, Hull advised McNutt that he had telegraphed the Consul General at Milan and other officers in Europe that no action in the cases of persons seeking visas to the Philippines should as yet be taken. Seeking an official statement from the Commonwealth officials on the matter, Hull advised McNutt that

*aside from the question of policy involved in the admission into the Philippine Islands of these and similar groups of persons from Central Europe, there are also involved technical questions of admissibility under section 3 of the Immigration Act of 1917 which excluded among other classes of aliens, persons whose passage is paid for by any corporation, association, society, municipality, or foreign government either directly or indirectly and persons likely to become a public charge.*³¹

Several important observations can be made as a result of this radiogram from the U.S. Secretary of State to the U.S. High Commissioner of the Philippines regarding the issuance of visas to Jewish refugees fleeing to the Philippines. It shows that the U.S. State Department had not been officially notified earlier about rescue immigration to the Philippines and it implies that the State Department viewed this rescue as a way for undesirable "Central" Europeans to enter U.S. territories. It also shows that while the State Department could not cite quota restrictions on immigration to the Philippines, they did focus on exclusionary clauses of the 1917 immigration laws to try to deter the rescue.

How should we view then the process of organizing a selection plan for Jewish refugee rescue in the Philippines that ensued without disclosure to the U.S. State Department officials? Obviously, McNutt had regarded such a disclosure as unnecessary and considered it an affair that fell totally within the discretion of his office and that of Philippine President Quezon, who had already offered his support for the program.³² The fact that U.S. Secretary of State Cordell Hull requested clarification of the immigration procedures for the Philippines from the U.S. High Commissioner tells us that he too recognized McNutt's authority over the issue. This may be reasonably assumed when given the fact that additional duties and functions delegated to the High Commissioner under the provisions of section 7 of the Independence Act were forwarded to McNutt on 1 March 1937, when he accepted his appointment by Pres. Franklin D. Roosevelt to be High Commissioner to the Philippines. These instructions granted the High Commissioner authority to waive passport and visa requirements for aliens in certain categories.³³ The manner of the issuance of the visas in the execution of the plan confirms McNutt's preeminence over the State Department in approving applicants for visas to the Philippines. An examination of important events regarding immigration practices in the Philippines in 1937 and 1938 offers added contextualization for the procedures initiated in order to facilitate controlled immigration of refugee Jews into the Philippines.

According to McNutt's quarterly report for December 1937, "considerable confusion" occurred in 1937 when instructions from

the U.S. State Department advised U.S. consular officers overseas “that they had no authority to refuse to issue visas for aliens desiring to proceed to the Philippines, except for such aliens whose entry might be considered harmful to the public safety.”³⁴ McNutt’s 1937 report further stated that the U.S. State Department advised the consular officers that “admissibility of aliens is one to be determined by the immigration officers of the Philippine Islands upon arrival at Philippine Ports.”³⁵ McNutt recounted how the observance of the U.S. State Department directives by the consular officers abroad had allowed large numbers of undesirable aliens unlimited influx into the Philippines, creating a serious problem that the Commonwealth government was ill-equipped to handle.³⁶ Neither U.S. Consuls abroad nor Philippine immigration officers in Manila exercised appropriate restrictions when needed. When the administration of the immigration laws was transferred from the Commonwealth Department of Finance to the Philippine Department of Labor, officials unschooled in the Immigration Laws of 1917 failed miserably in their execution of those laws.

McNutt’s office penned a memorandum on this growing problem, which documented serious infractions by Philippine officials. The memorandum depicted Philippine immigration as having “no regulations and the whole thing [being] handled on a purely hit-or-miss system.”³⁷ McNutt’s observation of the ineptitude of the Philippine immigration officials to execute laws and procedures effectively was written 29 April 1938, during the time when McNutt and the JRC conferred together on procedures for refugee rescue in the Philippines. McNutt’s office advised Quezon that he hire experts on immigration laws and practices in the U.S. to come and restructure immigration laws for the Philippines. According to McNutt’s report, such advisors arrived in December 1938. But during the earlier months of 1938, Quezon executed a probe into the allegations of misconduct in his immigration office and as a result suspended twenty-three officers and employees of the immigration service and prosecuted four. It was during this time of upheaval and restructuring of the immigration policies and offices in the Philippines that the unusual empowerment of immigrant selection by the JRC in Manila for the issuance of visas into the Philippines came into being, a process that took the power of visa selection out of the hands of Philippine Port

Authority officers, U.S. State Department officials, and American consular officers abroad and put it squarely into the hands of the JRC and Paul V. McNutt.

In response to Cordell Hull's inquiry regarding Philippine immigration policies for the five hundred non-Italian Jews seeking visas to the Philippines, McNutt advised the US Secretary of State that the –

[C]ommonwealth officials [referring to Quezon] and local committee [referring to JRC] think it unwise to attempt absorption additional refugees at this time . . . visas should be given only to those selected from lists submitted in advance to Commonwealth officials and committee. Commonwealth officials concur in opinion that, with such safeguards, experiment will be successful and maximum number of refugees can be absorbed.³⁸

From this point forward, it was clear that immigration of refugee Jews into the Philippines would be under the auspices of Commonwealth officials, namely Quezon and McNutt, and members of the Jewish Refugee Committee of Manila. After several communiqués went back and forth between the offices of the U.S. State Department and the High Commissioner of the Philippines, McNutt detailed the selection plan for State Department officials:

Initial request and placement of refugee families in the Philippines came from the Refugee Economic Corporation ... and was submitted to Commonwealth officials and to a Committee of Representatives of Jewish Citizens headed by P.S. Frieder ... All concerned agreed to absorb 100 families of approved records in designated professions and vocations in three groups at intervals of sixty days ... Selections based on these records now being made by Commonwealth authorities and committee. Suggest that when lists are complete, they be forwarded to Department of State in order that appropriate consular officers be authorized to give visas. Commonwealth officials request that visas be given only to them on approved lists.³⁹

A JDC memorandum reveals that this selection plan intended “to be increased to five hundred if initial efforts [were] successful.”⁴⁰ I am unaware of any other rescue of Jewish refugees where the power of the consular officers in selecting those so fortunate as to receive a U.S. Immigration Visa was taken from the consuls and put into the hands of a local committee of Jewish businessmen.

However, the State Department did not accept its impotence in this matter lightly. In numerous communiqués, State Department officials called the attention of the Commonwealth authorities to the provisions of the Immigration Act of 1917 relating to the exclusion of aliens likely to become public charges, repeating how “this act is applicable to the Philippine Islands” and that the Commonwealth authorities were “responsible for the enforcement of the Act in the Philippine Islands.”⁴¹ McNutt’s short response on 25 October 1938, containing the first official list of German refugee Jews selected for immigration into the Philippines assured State Department officials that “all refugees now in [the] Islands have been placed satisfactorily.”⁴²

Once the Hilfsverein in Berlin received the McNutt-Frieder list, they compiled applications from Jewish German candidates and forwarded them to the REC, which then sent them to the Philippines, where a three man committee from the Jewish community, led by one of the Frieder brothers, evaluated them.⁴³ The committee checked their prerequisites for immigration, including current passports, applicant background information, former professional or other activities, available funds to offer temporary sustenance, and the likelihood of eventual successful assimilation into the current Philippine community. When the committee had the assurances it needed, it recommended the issuance of visas by name and address of the applicants in the form of an affidavit, which they presented to McNutt for his approval. Once approved by Quezon and McNutt, both of whom looked for the necessary documentation that the JRC had adequate funds on deposit for the refugees, the list was radioed to the U.S. State Department. Through this process, McNutt directed the State Department “that appropriate consular officials be authorized to give visas” to the listed names of selected refugees.⁴⁴ The first selection list, composed on 25 October 1938, authorized visas for over one hundred Germans Jews – men, women and children – along

with six refugee Jews from Austria. McNutt augmented this list one month later with another forty-six names from Germany and two from Italy, totaling one hundred families in all.

As the issuance of visas progressed, the State Department informed McNutt that consular officers in Singapore, New Zealand, Australia, Netherlands, East Indies, India, Egypt, and Shanghai had been notified “that visas should not be issued to German refugees proceeding to the Philippine Islands without notice of authorization for entry into the Islands having been received from the Philippine authorities through the Department of State.”⁴⁵ This widespread communication to consular officers abroad regarding immigration into the Philippines spurred inquiries regarding non-German and non-Jewish refugee immigration into the Philippines as well. When the State Department then advised the consular offices not to issue immigration visas to the Philippines except to persons on a pre-approved selection list,⁴⁶ clarification for exceptions to the rule began to pour in. The State Department asked McNutt “to obtain an expression of the views of the Philippine authorities regarding the cases of persons other than those of German refugees” seeking visas to the Philippines at U.S. consular offices.⁴⁷ When an inquiry came in from the American Embassy in Paris, the response sent by the State Department can only be categorized as astounding:

*Information has been received from the Philippine authorities indicating that the procedure outlined in the circular instruction of November 30, 1938, diplomatic serial no. 3008, should be followed in the case of all refugees [italics added] desiring to proceed to the Philippine Islands.*⁴⁸

The significance of this must not be overlooked. This tells us the JRC committee in Manila had been empowered to review all applications for immigration to the Philippines, not just those of Jewish refugees.

In light of the complete disarray of the immigration offices of the Commonwealth government at the time, assigning this immigration application oversight to the JRC made a great deal of sense. They already had an effective organized system in place. So not only did

the Jewish Refugee Committee of Manila select European Jews for immigration to the Philippines, but they selected non-Jewish and non-destitute immigrants as well. Visa records of the State Department testify that in addition to names of refugee Jews being granted visas through the McNutt-Frieder selection plan, names of other classifications of refugees also emerged: "Commonwealth authorities authorize issuance of visas to following persons: Miss Hertha Gottscheer, Vienna, Austria, Catholic refugee."⁴⁹ Names of Catholic priests and nuns also show up in the visa records. So not only do we have a selection rescue plan of Jews saving Jews, but we have a selection plan of Jews saving non-Jews as well.

Summary

The selection plan eventually morphed into a sponsorship program in 1940 in response to the escalating economic trials in sustaining the ever-increasing refugee population. The significance of Jewish immigration to the Philippines prior to the U.S. entering WWII goes beyond the 1,301 refugee lives they saved, important as that may be, and demonstrates that industrious persons could devise rescue in the face of both natural and contrived obstacles when there was a will to do so. The gates of fate could swing both ways and rescuers in the Philippines exploited that fact whenever it swung in their favor.

The sequence of rescue in the Philippines verifies that observation, beginning with the rescue of German Jews from Shanghai, whom fate delivered into the hands of the Jewish Community of Manila via the strangely generous auspices of the German Consul in the Philippines. And while U.S. Immigration Laws restricted rescue into the United States both qualitatively and quantitatively, quota limitations on immigration into the Philippines would not be enforceable until the Commonwealth Government enacted its own immigration laws in 1941. By this time, the selection plan and sponsorship program had already successfully rescued well over 1,000 refugees.⁵⁰

The empowerment of the Jewish Refugee Committee by the Philippine government over immigration applications prior to 1940 came during one of those favorable swings of fate when corruption had crippled the immigration offices of the Philippine Government

and a complete revamping of the immigration laws were in process. The JRC's impartial, non-partisan approach to selection between 1937 and 1940 guaranteed its ability to continue to offer refuge to Jews during 1941 through the then newly constituted immigration laws of the Philippine Government.

Another important "fateful" sequence of events brought Paul McNutt to the Philippines as U.S. High Commissioner from 1937 to 1939 – the most important years for the organization and implementation of the selection rescue program. The importance of McNutt's role in the rescue of Jews in the Philippines must again be stressed. His mediation between President Quezon, the Jewish Refugee Committee in Manila, the Jewish relief organizations in New York, and the U.S. State Department committees and agencies was absolutely essential to the success of refugee rescue. It is doubtful if rescue could have been implemented without his intercession.

While different Jewish relief organizations share credit for the success of Jewish rescue in the Philippines as well, the unique system of residential rotation that the Frieder brothers practiced between their homes in Cincinnati and Manila always placed one brother in charge of the rescue relief operations in the Philippines, while the other brothers stateside continually visited offices of the REC and the JDC in New York to effectively cut through bureaucratic red-tape that often tied-up philanthropic purse strings. The presence of the Frieder brothers in the Philippines, along with their business affluence and humanitarian proclivity, assured a continual leadership over the rescue operations in the Philippines that had to adjust as conditions changed over the years.

And last, and most important, was the election of Manuel Quezon as President of the Commonwealth Nation of the Philippines, who, at any time, could have disapproved of the refugee rescue venture and put a halt to it. But the evidence shows that Quezon went out of his way, putting his own political career at risk, to aid refugees around the world by offering them a friendly haven in the Philippines. At a time when all other nations of the world closed their doors to the Jewish refugee crisis, Quezon offered a site for mass resettlement, expressing that "he would be happy [to] settle a million refugees in Mindanao."⁵¹

Although thwarted in this effort by U.S. State Department reticence and the entrance of Japan into the war, which ended all further rescue plans in the Philippines when the islands came under Japanese occupation, Quezon's generous offer to rescue Europe's stateless and persecuted Jews stands as a moral victory against a backdrop of an international descent into indifference and apathy.

This paper only briefly highlighted a few aspects of the remarkable story of how one small Asian country managed to do what so many more capable nations of the world were reluctant to do – save Jewish lives. It is remarkable because they managed to circumvent the inclination of U.S. State Department officials' propensity to obstruct Jewish rescue and they more than quadrupled the population of the Philippine Jewish community in the process. By offering a haven for 1,301 refugees, the Philippine rescuers saved them from the fate of the six million Jews who were murdered in the Holocaust. While 1,301 refugees, when compared to twelve million victims of Nazi atrocities, are not so many, to those hundreds who found a welcoming home for them in Manila, each individual rescued life was a mitzvah.

Notes

An earlier version of this article was originally published in “Wer bleibt, opfert seine Jahre, vielleicht sein Leben” through Wallstein Verlag, 2010 and is updated and reprinted by permission from Beate Meyer, editor of the above named publication (together with Susanne Heim and Francis Nicosia.

Notes

- ¹ Bill Ong Hing, *Defining America Through Immigration Policy*, Philadelphia 2004, p. 70.
- ² EBSCOhost [database on-line], Immigration Act of 1917, 2009, Vol. 1 Issue 1, pp. 45-72. Full text of the Act can also be found at US Immigration Legislation Online, University of Washington-Bothell, Autumn 2007, <http://library.uwb.edu/guides/USimmigration/39%20stat%20874.pdf>. Accessed on 9 June 2007.

- ³ United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. "German and Austrian Jewish Refugees in Shanghai." Holocaust Encyclopedia. <https://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=1000709>. Accessed on 3 September 2016.
- ⁴ See Bonnie Harris, *From Zbaszyn to Manila: The Holocaust Odyssey of Joseph Cysner and Refugee Rescue in the Philippines* (Santa Barbara, 2009), pp. 149-161 for details concerning the Jewish Community in Shanghai.
- ⁵ The Sephardic Jewish Community in Shanghai was an older, smaller, and more established group that consisted of about 700 Sephardic Jews whose families came from Iraq as merchants in the mid-1800s and quickly climbed the social and economic ladder. The Ashkenazi Jews in Shanghai, while much larger in number, had only come from Russia in the aftermath of the Russian Revolution in 1917.
- ⁶ Max Berges, "Please, don't worry! Nothing came of it," Center for Jewish History, New York, Leo Beck Institute Archives, Max Berges Memoir Project, call no. MM8, 334. Berges stated that 30 to 40 Jewish couples left Shanghai on the "Gneisenau."
- ⁷ "Memorandum of Conversation Between Mr. Hyman and Morris Frieder of Cincinnati, Ohio on November 28th [1938] at 3:30 P.M.," American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee Archives, New York, JDC Collection 33/44, File #784.
- ⁸ Frank Ephraim, *Escape to Manila: From Nazi Tyranny to Japanese Terror* (Chicago, 2003), p. 22. Frank Ephraim, a survivor of the Jewish Refugee Community in Manila, presented a complete database of all the Jewish refugees who came to the Philippines to the JewishGen Family Genealogy website, in which he identified 1,301 names.
- ⁹ Yehuda Bauer, *My Brother's Keeper: A History of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee 1929-1939*, Philadelphia, 1974, S. 157.

- ¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 145.
- ¹¹ Richard Breitman, Barbara McDonald Stewart, and Severin Hochberg (eds.), *Advocate for the Doomed: The Diaries and Papers of James McDonald 1932-1935* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007), pp. 798-799.
- ¹² Sharon Delmendo has documented the fact that Dwight D. Eisenhower, in the Philippines on Douglas MacArthur's staff, was not involved in Jewish refugee rescue in her work in progress: "Ike and the Jews: Was Dwight D. Eisenhower involved in Jewish refugee rescue in the Philippines during the Holocaust"?
- ¹³ I. George Blake, *Paul V. McNutt: Portrait of a Hoosier Statesman* (Indianapolis, 1966), pp. 124-172. President Roosevelt appointed McNutt High Commissioner to the Philippines on 1 March 1937 and he served in this capacity for two years – the most crucial years in organizing Jewish rescue in the Philippines. Blake describes him as a defender of all and "particularly of their civil rights [...] The result of McNutt's stand was that the Jews, Negroes, and the Catholics looked upon him as their champion." After serving as High Commissioner, McNutt filled other posts in the Roosevelt Administration and later returned to the Philippines as the first US Ambassador to the New Republic in 1946. See also Stanley Karnow, *In Our Image: America's Empire in the Philippines* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1989), pp. 323-325.
- ¹⁴ For details about the background of the Weiss brothers, see Ephraim, *Escape to Manila*, pp. 27-28.
- ¹⁵ "McNutt on Way Home with Data on China," *The New York Times*, 11 February 1938, p. 12.
- ¹⁶ "How Paul V. McNutt Aided the Refugees" McNutt Mss., Box 10.
- ¹⁷ *Ibid.*

- ¹⁸ Paul V. McNutt to Julius Weiss, 19 May 1938, American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee Archives, JDC Collection 33/44, File #784.
- ¹⁹ "Memorandum . . . November 28th [1938] at 3:30 P.M.," JDC Collection 33/44, File #784.
- ²⁰ McNutt to Weiss, May 19, 1938, JDC Collection 33/44, File #784.
- ²¹ *Ibid.*
- ²² Bruno Schachner (REC) to Hilfsverein der Juden in Deutschland, 1 June 1938, American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee Archives, JDC Collection 33/44, File #784.
- ²³ Charles Liebman to Paul V. McNutt, 10 June 1938, American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee Archives, JDC Collection 33/44, File #784.
- ²⁴ *Ibid.*
- ²⁵ *Ibid.*
- ²⁶ Paul V. McNutt to Charles Liebman, 24 June 1938, American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee Archives, JDC Collection 33/44, File #784.
- ²⁷ *Ibid.*
- ²⁸ Burnett to McNutt, 13 July 1938, NARA II, Record Group 350, Records of the Bureau of Insular Affairs, General Classified Files 1898-1945, Box 1338, Entry 5, File 28943-1.
- ²⁹ McNutt to Burnett, 16 July 1938, NARA II, Record Group 350, Records of the Bureau of Insular Affairs, General Classified Files 1898-19445, Box 1338, Entry 5, File 28943-1.

- ³⁰ Hull to McNutt, 12 September 1938, NARA II, Record Group 350, Records of the Bureau of Insular Affairs, General Classified Files 1898-1945, Box 1338, Entry 5, File #28943-2.
- ³¹ *Ibid.*
- ³² McNutt to Burnett, 16 July 1938, NARA II, Record Group 350, Records of the Bureau of Insular Affairs, General Classified Files 1898-1945, Box 1338, Entry 5, File 28943, – 1-.
- ³³ Woodring to McNutt, 1 March 1937, NARA II, Record Group 350, Records of the Bureau of Insular Affairs, General Classified Files, Office of the US High Commissioner, Entry 5, Box 472, Folder 3038-B, 118.
- ³⁴ “Quarterly Report of the United States High Commissioner to the Philippine Islands to the President of the United States Quarter Ending December 31, 1937,” Indiana University Bloomington, Lilly Library Manuscript Collections, McNutt Mss, Box 9, S. 18.
- ³⁵ *Ibid.*
- ³⁶ *Ibid.*, S. 19.
- ³⁷ *Ibid.*, S. 59-60.
- ³⁸ McNutt, translation of coded radiogram received 15 September 1939. NARA II, Record Group 350, Records of the Bureau of Insular Affairs, General Classified Files 1898-1945, Entry 5, Box 1338, Folder #28943-2.
- ³⁹ McNutt, translation of coded radiogram received 30 September 1939, NARA II, Record Group 350, Records of the Bureau of Insular Affairs, General Classified Files 1898-1945, Entry 5, Box 1338, Folder #28943-5.
- ⁴⁰ “Memorandum re: Philippine Islands,” 1 October 1938, American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee Archives, JDC Collection 33/44, File #784.

- ⁴¹ Messersmith to McNutt, 8 October 1938, NARA II, Record Group 350, Records of the Bureau of Insular Affairs, General Classified Files 1898-1945, Entry 5, Box 1338, Folder #28943-6.
- ⁴² McNutt to State Department, 25 October 1938, NARA II, Record Group 350, Records of the Bureau of Insular Affairs, General Classified Files 1898-1945, Entry 5, Box 1338, Folder #28943-8.
- ⁴³ Herbert Katzki, JDC Office meeting, June 23, 1939, American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee Archives, JDC Collection 33/44, File #784.
- ⁴⁴ *Ibid.*
- ⁴⁵ Messersmith to McNutt, 30 November 1938, NARA II, Record Group 350, Records of the Bureau of Insular Affairs, General Classified Files 1898-1945, Entry 5, Box 1338, Folder #28943-16.
- ⁴⁶ The Department of State issued an official "Visa Instruction" regarding "German Refugees Proceeding to the Philippine Islands" for transmission to all US Consuls and Embassies. Messersmith, Visa Instruction, 30 November 1938. NARA I, Record Group 59, General Records Department of State, Visa Division 1914-1940, Entry 704, Box 245, 811B55, J/19a.
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- ⁴⁸ "To the American Charge d'Affairs ad interim," Paris, 12/14/38. NARA I, Record Group 59, General Records Department of State, Visa Division 1914-1940, Entry 704, Box 245, 811B.55, J/17.
- ⁴⁹ War Department, Washington, 19 May 1939. NARA I, Record Group 59, General Records Department of State, Visa Division 1914-1940, Entry 704, Box 246, 811B.55, J/192.
- ⁵⁰ For further discussion on the Immigration Laws of the Philippines ratified in 1940 and how these new laws affected rescue in the

Philippines, see Bonnie Harris, *From Zbaszyn to Manila: The Holocaust Odyssey of Joseph Cysner and Refugee Rescue in the Philippines* (Santa Barbara, 2009), pp. 302-311.

- ⁵¹ Herbert Frieder to Bruno Schachner, 8 December 1938, American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, JDC, Collection 33/44, File #787a.

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