

Handout

Flora Hochsinger / Harriet Postman Packet

DOCUMENT 1 (Overview)

On July 14, 1939, Harriet Postman of Waltham, Massachusetts, received a letter from a person she had never met: Dr. Flora Hochsinger, a Jewish woman living in Vienna, Austria, which had been annexed by Nazi Germany in 1938. Hochsinger was seeking an American to sponsor her immigration to the United States. She said that she had received Postman's information through a mutual friend.

On August 4, 1939, Harriet Postman replied to Flora Hochsinger's letter to say that she would help, though she couldn't provide the affidavit herself. Postman said she would contact people she thought might have the financial resources to supply the requested affidavit. She sent out numerous letters of inquiry to politicians, celebrities, and organizations she thought might be in a position to aid Flora Hochsinger.

One letter that Postman sent was to the movie star and anti-Nazi activist Edward G. Robinson. Robinson, a Jewish immigrant from Romania, was an outspoken critic of Nazism and an actor who appeared in many films, including *Confessions of a Nazi Spy* (1939). Robinson promptly replied to Postman, expressing "sorrow" and "keen regret" for Hochsinger's plight. He was unable to assist: "I have already obligated myself to help so many refugees that I find it impossible at this time to go further."

Postman also wrote to the prominent newspaper columnist and radio personality Dorothy Thompson. Throughout the 1930s and 40s, Thompson had urged her fellow Americans to pay attention to the threat that Nazi Germany posed to democracy and to Europe's Jews. In 1939, *Time* magazine called her "undoubtedly the most influential woman in America," after First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt. But the *New York Herald Tribune*, writing on behalf of Thompson, declined to intervene, writing that "so many people appeal to Miss Thompson for help, and there is simply nothing she can do."

Finally, on October 16, 1939, Postman received a positive response. B'nai B'rith, a leading Jewish fraternal organization in the United States, agreed to take up Flora Hochsinger's case. The organization put Hochsinger on a "waiting list for affidavit of support and corroborative documents and when her turn is reached we will make every effort to procure the necessary papers in her behalf." But a year and a half after B'nai B'rith's October 1939 letter, Hochsinger was still without a financial affidavit from an American. If she couldn't obtain an affidavit before her interview at the US consulate, she would lose her chance to leave Nazi-occupied Vienna.

On May 24, 1941, Hochsinger wrote again to Postman, stating that she had found a place to live in Alabama with an elderly friend but still required a financial affidavit. On July 27, 1941, Postman once more attempted to help Hochsinger find an American financial

sponsor, this time writing to First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt, which she had considered doing nearly two years earlier. On August 24, 1941, the Department of State, on behalf of Eleanor Roosevelt, informed Postman that “no action may be taken” because the US consulates in Nazi-occupied Europe were closed.

Harriet Postman never found a sponsor for Flora Hochsinger. Hochsinger and 1,000 other Jews were forcibly deported from Vienna on June 9, 1942. A few weeks later, Hochsinger was executed in a forest close to the Maly Trostenets concentration camp near Minsk, in German-occupied Belorussia.

DOCUMENT 2

Vienna 66, Türkenstr. 29.
July 14th 1939.
Miss H. Postman
44 Congress Str., Portland
Maine.

Dear Madam,

I am Dr. phil [PhD] Flora (Sara) Hochsinger, a Jewess of german nationality, born and still living in Vienna. I am compelled to leave my country, and I should be happy to find some work in U.S.A. As I do not know any relations of mine living in America, I come to beg you to help me to get an affidavit.

I am [PhD], I took my degree at the University of Vienna in the year 1910. I was teacher of mathematics at the "People's High- school Volksheim" in Vienna, where I taught 32 years. I had, more- over, many private lessons, I conducted a Home for children in Vienna, and a summer-home for children in the country. I was a pupil of Dr. Alfred Adler's, when he still lived in Vienna, so I know individual psychology. I know all sorts of needle-work. I know to knit pullovers, to crotchet gloves and collars, to make nets, belts, brooches, and different other hand-made works.

Would you, dear madam, lend me a helping hand, to achieve my longed-for aim? I am so eager to do some useful work yet, and should my request be successful, I shall certainly do my very best to satisfy my employers. On no account I should wish to become a burden to you nor to any one else.

Will you, then, be kind enough as to help me to get an affidavit?

Hoping that I am so lucky as to find in you a rescuer, I remain, thanking you beforehand yours faithfully,

Dr. Flora Sara Hochsinger,
Vienna 66, Türkenstr. 29.
Germany.¹

¹ Letter to Harriet Postman from Flora Hochsinger, July 14, 1939, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

DOCUMENT 3

Letter from Edward Robinson to Harriet Postman, September 11, 1939:

Dear Mrs. Postman : —

I read with interest and with sorrow your letter of September 1st together with the copy enclosed from Dr. Flora Sara Hochsinger.

It is with keen regret that I must refuse to aid. I have already obligated myself to help so many refugees that I find it impossible at this time to go further.

I hope you may find someone who can help Dr. Hochsinger.

Sincerely,

Edward G. Robinson¹

¹ Letter from Edward Robinson to Harriet Postman, September 11, 1939, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

DOCUMENT 4

Letter from Harriet Postman to Dorothy Thompson, October 7, 1939:

Dear Madam:

Your columns and broadcast I find stimulating and I'm writing to you because yours on Anton and Anna (Gazette Sept 39) revealed a case similar to one brought to my attention by another Frau Doktor, for I don't assume your Frau dr. is mine.

I am therefore enclosing copy of letters I received from this stranger — Dr. Flora Sarah Hochsinger, P.h.D., which are self-explanatory. I'm writing to you because I hope that among your many well-to-do acquaintances there may be a position as governess, or teacher in a private school where she could teach languages or mathematics. Unfortunately, our own circumstances are such as to disqualify us for affidavits in such case, nor provide for her until she obtains work. I believe that if a position is promise[d] Dr. Hochsinger, it may be possible to obtain an affidavit through the Council of Jewish Women, or such.

I have already written to six persons who I thought could hire a governess, but without success. Your sympathy for "Frau Doktor" gives me hope that through your many contacts and influence this suppliant will be provided for.

Sincerely,

Mrs. A.L. Postman

P.S. I am enclosing a clipping from the Boston Transcript readers' forum which might interest you. Just shows how [illegible] is the Nazi poison.

Months ago I suggested through the newspapers that the best way to minimize Fr Coughlin's¹ pernicious and anti-semitic and pseudo-democratic pose was to have speakers comment immediately on his broadcasts, following his, over the same networks. They could have made him ridiculous. Now, however, being banned from radio unless censored he will make of himself a martyr and a hero. Too bad.²

¹ Father Coughlin was a Canadian-American Catholic priest who frequently broadcast his antisemitic and isolationist views through weekly radio addresses to American audiences throughout the 1930s and early 1940s. President Franklin Roosevelt's administration made several attempts to force Coughlin off the airwaves.

² Letter from Harriet Postman to Dorothy Thompson, transcript, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum collection.

DOCUMENT 5

Letter from B'nai B'rith to Harriet Postman, October 16, 1939:

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

B'NAI B'RITH

1003 K STREET, N. W.
WASHINGTON, D. C.

October 16, 1939.

Mrs. Harriet Postman,
27 Plympton Street,
Waltham, Mass.

Dear Mrs. Postman:

Your letter of October 9, addressed to Mr. Alfred M. Cohen at Cincinnati, Ohio, relative to the prospective immigration into the United States of Dr. Flora Sara Hochsinger of Vienna, has been referred to us for attention.

We wish to advise that we have placed Dr. Hochsinger's name on our waiting list for affidavit of support and corroborative documents and when her turn is reached we will make every effort to procure the necessary papers in her behalf.

We assure you that this matter will be given our continuous and careful attention.

With kind personal regards, we are

Cordially yours,

REFUGEE AID,

BY *Seymour S. Guthman*

Seymour S. Guthman

ec

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AMERICAN DISTRICTS

DOCUMENT 6

Flora Hochsinger wrote to Harriet Postman on May 24, 1941, that she still needed a financial affidavit:

Vienna 66
PO Box 113
Vienna, May 24th 1941

Mrs. Harriet Postman
27 Plympton Str., Waltham, Mass.

Dear Mrs. Postman,

I beg you to allow me to refer to your kind letter from Nov. 29th 1939. You made some endeavors to get an affidavit for me, speaking to some friends of yours and to some organizations. I got several letters from U.S.A., but I still am without an affidavit, though my turn now is coming, and I think I could soon start, if I could succeed in finding a sponsor.

Mr. Fred W. Raper, the widower of a friend of mine, living in Fairhope, Alabama, invited me to live in his house and to keep it, till I shall have found another occupation. So I am sure that I shall not be a burden to my sponsor. Only Mr. Raper is an old man who has no income, and he therefore cannot be accepted as sponsor.

I beg you to excuse me for writing you once more and to feel sure that I should be very thankful, if you would be as kind as to try once more to interest somebody so as to secure an affidavit for me.

Yours
very sincerely
Dr. Flora Sara Hochsinger
Vienna 66
PO Box 113.¹

¹ Letter from Flora Hochsinger to Harriet Postman, May 24, 1941, transcript, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

DOCUMENT 7

Letter from Department of State on behalf of Eleanor Roosevelt, August 25, 1941:

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

ADDRESS OFFICIAL COMMUNICATIONS TO
THE SECRETARY OF STATE
WASHINGTON, D. C.



DEPARTMENT OF STATE
WASHINGTON

In reply refer to
VD 811.111 Hochsinger, Flora S.

AUGUST 25 1941

Mrs. Harriet Postman,
27 Plympton Street,
Waltham, Massachusetts.

Madam:

Referring to your letter of July 27, 1941, addressed to Mrs. Roosevelt, regarding the visa case of Dr. Flora Sara Hochsinger now residing in Vienna, Germany, I have to inform you that no action may be taken in this case at present because there are no American consular offices operating in the district under reference.

In the event the alien or aliens in whom you are interested are able to proceed to a territory in which they may appear at an American Consulate, you should notify the Department immediately in order that appropriate advice may be given regarding your further procedure. Before taking action the Department should be furnished with some definite evidence that the alien or aliens concerned will be able to obtain permission to leave the country in which they are now residing and to enter some other country where the visa application will be executed. Otherwise it is not believed that any useful purpose will be served by further correspondence in this matter.

Very truly yours,

A. M. Warren
Chief, Visa Division

Visa Form A-3