

**Serpa Pinto Passenger Lists Are Now Online
in the JDC Archives Names Index**

by Jeffrey Edelstein

The JDC Archives has recently completed the indexing of names from lists of passengers on the SS *Serpa Pinto*, which made about a dozen sailings from Lisbon to North and South America during World War II. JDC, HICEM (an organization formed by the merger of HIAS, ICA, and Emigdirect), and other organizations provided financial support to enable hundreds of Jews stranded in Portugal, Spain, and Casablanca, Morocco, to emigrate. During the course of the war, the *Serpa Pinto* bore more refugees across the Atlantic than any other single transport. The lists, dated 1941-1944, include details such as nationality, age or date of birth, and occupation; in addition to the United States, destinations include Cuba, Jamaica, Mexico, the Dominican Republic, and Canada.

The names may be searched on the JDC Archives website at <http://archives.jdc.org/archives-search>.

The JDC Archives documents the relief, rescue and rehabilitation activities of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee from its founding in 1914 to the present. Its holdings include over 3 miles of text documents, over 100,000 photographs, a research library of 6,000 books, and approximately 1,500 audiovisual materials, including 200 oral histories.

The JDC Names Index is a growing database where one can search for names of relatives, friends, ancestors, and anyone worldwide

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A group of French refugee children arriving from Marseilles via Spain at the Rossio railroad station in Lisbon, September 1943, to board the SS *Serpa Pinto*. Photo courtesy JDC Archives.

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who has received JDC aid, financial or otherwise. The currently indexed material includes lists of people helped from 1914 to 1973. While this is a substantial sampling of the names in JDC's records, it is by no means the entire collection, and many additional lists will be included in the future.

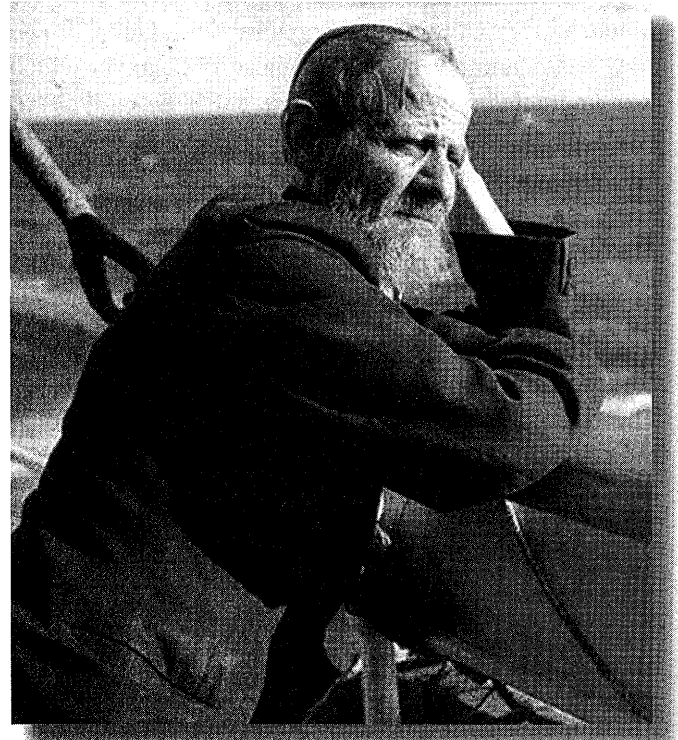
Jeffrey Edelstein is the Digitization Project Manager at the JDC Archives. He supervises the volunteers, several of them from the JGS, who indexed the lists described above. ☆



Children from Spain at the Rossio railroad station in Lisbon prior to sailing on the *SS Serpa Pinto*, September 1943. Photo courtesy JDC Archives.



View of passengers relaxing on the deck of the *SS Serpa Pinto*, which carried Jewish refugees from Europe to New York and other Western ports, c.1943. Photo courtesy JDC Archives.



A Jewish refugee looks out to sea aboard the *SS Serpa Pinto*, c.1943. Photo courtesy JDC Archives.

A Request from the Leo Baeck Institute

The Leo Baeck Institute is seeking information about and copies of visas issued by Spanish diplomat Eduardo Propper de Callejon. De Callejon facilitated the escape of thousands of Jews from occupied France in June 1940. Contact Karen Franklin at kfranklin@lbi.cjh.org.

Case Studies: Immigrants on the *Serpa Pinto*, 1942-1943

By Linda Cantor

The *Serpa Pinto* was an ocean liner which brought about 7000 people to safety in North and Central America from Morocco and Lisbon during World War II when there were few other ways to escape from Nazi Europe. She was originally built in 1914 as the *RMS Ebro* for the Royal Mail Steam Packet Company but was used as a cruiser by the Royal Navy in World War I. After several changes in ownership, she ended up under the ownership of the Companhia Colonial De Navegacao in Portugal in 1940, until finally being broken up in 1954.

Many of the voyages during World War II were financed, at least in part, by the "Joint", the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee or JDC. Most of the trips, which left from Lisbon and Casablanca, were to the United States but some went to Mexico, Jamaica, the Dominican Republic and Cuba. The JDC has a number of lists of these passengers which were completed in their offices, have recently been indexed, and are included on the Names Database on the JDC Archives website (<http://archives.jdc.org>).

These are not Passenger Arrivals Records, which exist separately at the U.S. Holocaust Museum and on Ancestry.com. Rather, they are internal JDC records of those people who applied to leave Europe and travel to the Americas in the years 1941 to 1944. The researcher can glean a great deal of biographical information about these travelers from the two sets of lists – Passenger Arrivals and JDC internal lists. I thought it would be interesting and, perhaps, informative to take a closer look at some of these travelers and figure out who was able to get from their homes, mostly in Western Europe, to Portugal and Morocco in the midst of World War II and, thus, make their escape. Was there a common thread? Were these ordinary people? Were they poor, middle class or rich? Educated? Professionals? I will look at these questions through a few case studies and we will see what we can learn about ordinary people from public records.

Case Study #1: Using Ancestry.com I discovered that **Leon Kapelus** first came to New York in May, 1939 on the *SS Champlain*, from Le Havre with two of his brothers. He was 36 years old and listed as a merchant, born in Cracow, Poland (although his youngest brother was listed as being born in Belgium). He was living in Paris, France, where his father Charles Kapelus lived, and was going to a friend, Nick Ridel on West 48th Street in New York City.

We then find Leon listed, along with his wife Eve, age 33, daughter Ginette, age 12, and son Michel, age 10, on the *Serpa Pinto*, sailing from Casablanca, Morocco on September 10, 1942 to Baltimore, Maryland. Again, he is listed as a merchant, born in Cracow but now living in Nice, France. We now have a clue about the earlier 1939 voyage as there is a comment that he was in the U.S. for six weeks in 1939. On the later journey, he is going to his uncle, David Lubell, at 21 West 46th Street, New York City. Lubelski was Eve's maiden name, according to Geni.com, so we assume that David was her uncle. The family is listed on the JDC list as arriving in Baltimore in October, 1942 from Lisbon, Portugal. The discrepancy on where they departed from is not clear.

The next trace of Leon is in the Index to Petitions for Naturalization, filed in New York. In June 1948 he filed a petition for naturalization. At this time, he was living at 97 Arden Street, New York (which is in Inwood, in upper Manhattan). We know that a 55-year-old Leon landed in Miami, FL in September, 1958 on Pan American Airways, from Santiago (and while the records don't say, I'm assuming that's Chile). The Social Security Death Index tells us that Leon died in 1993, while living in Flushing, Queens, NY.

What else can we learn about Leon? There is a listing in the Antwerp, Belgium Police Immigration Index for him, showing that he immigrated to Belgium between 1901 and 1915. The family's listing on Geni.com tells us that Michel died at the very young age of 44 in 1976. Our conclusions – the Kapelus family moved gradually from Cracow to Paris, to Nice, to either Portugal or Morocco, then to Baltimore and finally to New York, starting in the years immediately before World War II and through 1942. We know that Leon was a merchant and assume that he was middle class enough to be able to afford these moves. They were among the lucky ones that got out.

Case study #2: **Uscher Zeilig Munschak** is listed on the JDC list for the *Serpa Pinto* leaving Lisbon for Baltimore in October 1942. He is 66 years old and his nationality is 'stateless.' On the passenger arrivals list for the *Serpa Pinto*, sailing from Lisbon to Baltimore on September 8, 1942, he is listed as Uscher Zeiling Munschak, age 66, born in Kishined (sic), Rumania. He is an engineer and his last residence was Marseille, France. His wife Nathalie is still in Paris and he was going to his niece, Nathalie Wolodarsky, who lived at 105 West 70th Street,

Ship departure records show Rita traveling with Barbara (born in New Jersey in 1948, so I am assuming a daughter) on the *Queen Mary* to Cherbourg, June

Serpa Pinto Passengers		Age		Sex		Origin
71.	MALTEFPORT - Samuel J.	61	M	M		Statel.
72.	- Selma	58	F	M		"
73.	MAMEDE - Maria do C.	34	F	M		Portug.
74.	MAROBT - Jose RVe	21	M	S		Cuban
75.	MARQUES - Maria L.C.	23	F	M		U.S.C.
76.	RAMOS - Victor D.C.	3	M	S		U.S.C.
77.	MARTIN - Juline	27	M	S		U.S.C.
78.	MEDeiros - Manuel T.	33	M	M		U.S.C.
79.	MERDINGER - Egon	34	M	M		Statel.
80.	- Rita	26	F	M		"
81.	MODRYKAMIEN - Szoul	40	M	S		Polish

JDC List of Passengers SS Serpa Pinto, August, 1943

11, 1953 and returning on September 12, 1953 aboard the *Georgic*, sailing from LeHavre, France.

Egon died on August 1, 1982 in Redding Ridge, Connecticut and Rita died on September 8, 2005 in Lake Worth, Florida. They appeared to have lived middle class lives in the U.S. And although both were born in central Europe, they made their escape from Western Europe. And clearly members of their family also escaped, as they could.

Case Study #4: **Norbert Stuckler** was 17 years old on the JDC *Serpa Pinto* List for October 1943 and appeared to be traveling alone. The passenger arrivals record for the *Serpa Pinto*, leaving Lisbon on September 28, 1943 and arriving in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania on October 12, 1943, lists Norbert's profession as 'dresser.' (There are several possible meanings for this – surgeon's assistant, one who helps to dress actors in the theater, and textile worker. I have no way of knowing which was meant and if, indeed, any apply to a 17-year-old escaping in the middle of a war.) Although born in Vienna, Austria, he is listed as stateless. His parents, Amalia and Michel Stuckler are listed as "whereabouts unknown" and Norbert is going to his brother Emil Stuckler, in Kew Gardens, Queens, NY.

Norbert was one of the "children of La Hille," a group of about 800 German and Austrian children sent by their parents to Belgium in an attempt to provide safety for them in Brussels in 1939. They were helped by a group known as the "Belgian Women's Committee." After the Nazi capture of Belgium, about 100 of the

children left the Belgian refugee camps for southern France and Switzerland and ended up in the Chateau de La Hille, an old chateau, in Southern France, near Pamiers in Ariège, where they were helped by a group in France known as the "Swiss Children's Aid Society" (Secours Suisse aux Enfants, a sub-sector of the Red Cross of Switzerland). Walter Reed, a survivor from La Hille, wrote a book about these experiences, *The Children of La Hille: Eluding Nazi Capture During World War II*, published by Syracuse University Press in 2015. Reed mentions Norbert Stuckler:

In mid-December, Viennese-born Lucien Wolfgang and Norbert Stuckler (both seventeen) were the first La Hille teenagers to hike across the Pyrenees into Spain. Little is known about their route or the difficulties they encountered In a biography written in the 1990's, Wolfgang reported, "we made the escape mostly without a guide. After 3 days we were arrested in the village of Litlett outside Berga near Manresa and brought to a jail in Barcelona. On January 3, 1943, we were released, based on a New Year's amnesty by the Franco government."

We next see Norbert on U.S. World War II Army Enlistment Records, which tells us that he enlisted on October 31, 1945 and was a private first class. More records on Ancestry.com show that he received his naturalization at Fayetteville, North Carolina while living at Ft. Bragg, North Carolina in 1945. By the 1950's he was living in Benbrook, Texas. In 1962 Norbert and his wife Anna are living in Bangor,

No. [REDACTED]

Name STUCKLER, Norbert

residing at Fort Bragg, North Carolina

Age 18 years. Date of order of admission March 20, 1945

Date certificate issued March 20, 1945 by the U. S. District Court at Fayetteville, N. C.

Petition No. 77-M

Norbert Stuckler
(Complete and true signature of holder)

Maine and Norbert is in the U.S. Air Force. He served in the Air Force through 1974 (Department of Veterans Affairs Death Files). Norbert died in 2008 and is buried in Dallas-Ft. Worth National Cemetery alongside his wife Anna. Anna, born in Germany in 1921, died in 2013.

It's hard to draw many conclusions about Norbert as he was so young when he escaped Europe on the *Serpa Pinto*. He was born in Vienna, in central Europe and managed to get to Barcelona via La Hille. We don't know anything about his parents or what happened to them or much about his education beyond that it was obviously cut short. He joined the U.S. Army shortly after he arrived here and ended up with a career in the U.S. Air Force.

I choose these 4 records randomly and see no real commonalities except that all were successful in their American lives. They clearly are not the 'shtetl' Jews that the media talks so much about. Two were born in Vienna, Austria and one, although born in Eastern Europe, spent time in the West before his life was disrupted by World War II. One was only 17 when he emigrated, so we don't have any real information about his early life. Other than Norbert Stuckler, we have no way of knowing how they managed to get to either Morocco or Portugal in the middle of World War II but assume that they had some funds to accomplish this.

It is amazing to see how much we can learn about these people and their experiences from on-line public records. These were not famous people, just ordinary folks, yet I was able to trace them from their time in Portugal or Morocco till their deaths in the U.S. I learned a great deal from this research and am curious to learn more about topics such as La Hille. We could probably take this a step further by looking for their descendants but are not doing so for the purposes of this article. I hope that you can apply some of these techniques to your own research.

Linda Cantor, a retired teacher for the New York City Department of Education, has been researching her family history for over 30 years and has done considerable research on her Lithuanian, Galician and Volhynian roots. She coordinates the Rokiskis, Lithuania town SIG and is the webmaster for five KehilaLinks sites. She was president of JGS, Inc (New York) from 2007 to 2010 and is currently an Executive Council member. ☆