

Harry (Heinrich) Engel

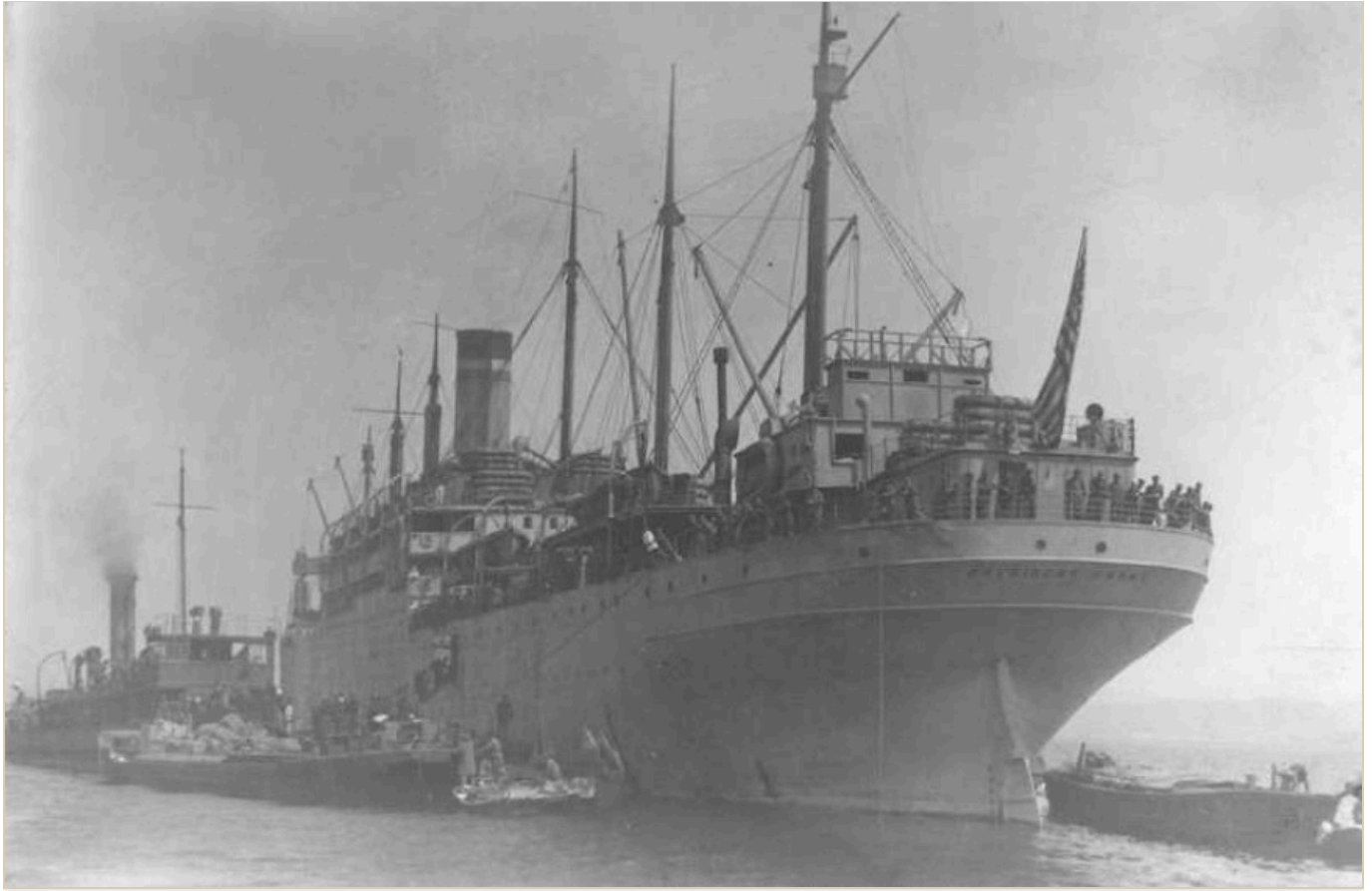
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Toporoutz, Bukovina, c.1896 • East Haven, Connecticut, 1983

Harry Engel was born on 12 January 1896 at Toporoutz, a Jewish village in Austrian Bukovina, the son of Wolf Engel and Elka née Morgenstern. In 1913, at seventeen, he sailed alone for America. He became a Connecticut farmer, married Jennie Green of Brooklyn, and raised two daughters, Esther and Elsie. Elsie later married Morris Soffer and became Ben Soffer's step-grandmother. This is the documentary record of his life, gathered from ships' manifests, naturalization papers, a census, and a remarkable pair of letters in the files of the U.S. State Department.

The crossing, 1913

Harry left from Hamburg aboard the Hamburg America liner *SS President Grant* and landed at Ellis Island on **1 October 1913**. The passenger list records him as “**Hersch Engel**” (the Yiddish *Hersch* behind the American *Harry*), age 17, single, nationality “Austria, Hebrew,” his last residence the Bukovina village of **Boian**, just east of his native Toporoutz. He crossed amid a cluster of fellow Bukovina Jews, among them the Retter family of Boian.



The SS President Grant (Hamburg America Line, built 1907), the ship Harry sailed on in 1913. Its name is visible on the bow. Public-domain photograph, Wikimedia Commons.

Two years later, on 18 October 1915, Harry swore his Declaration of Intention to become a citizen before the Supreme Court of New York in Tompkins County, giving his occupation as “farming.”

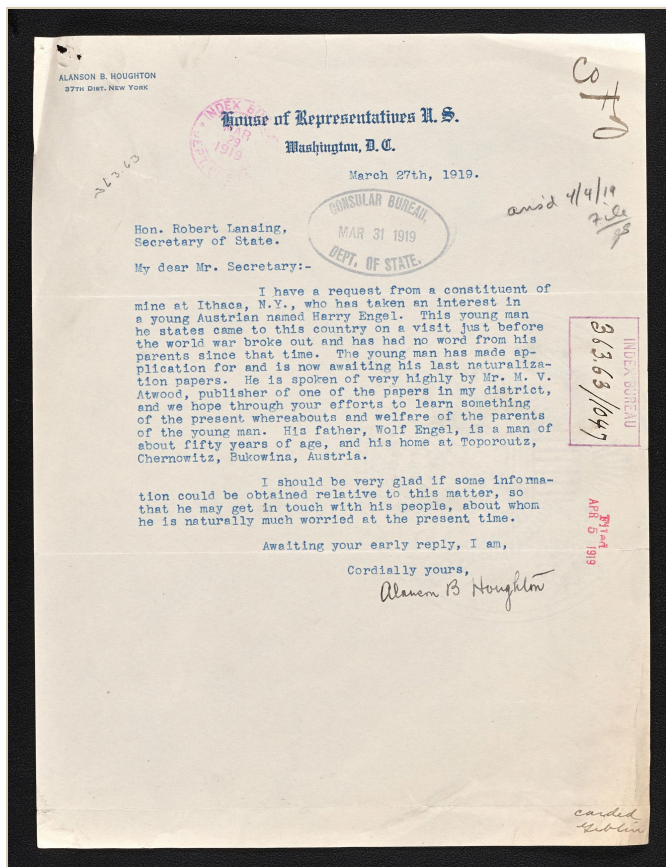
Looking for his parents, 1919

When the First World War engulfed Bukovina, Harry lost all contact with his family. By 1919 he was living in Ithaca, New York, still awaiting his final naturalization papers and “naturally much worried” about his parents. He turned to his congressman for help.

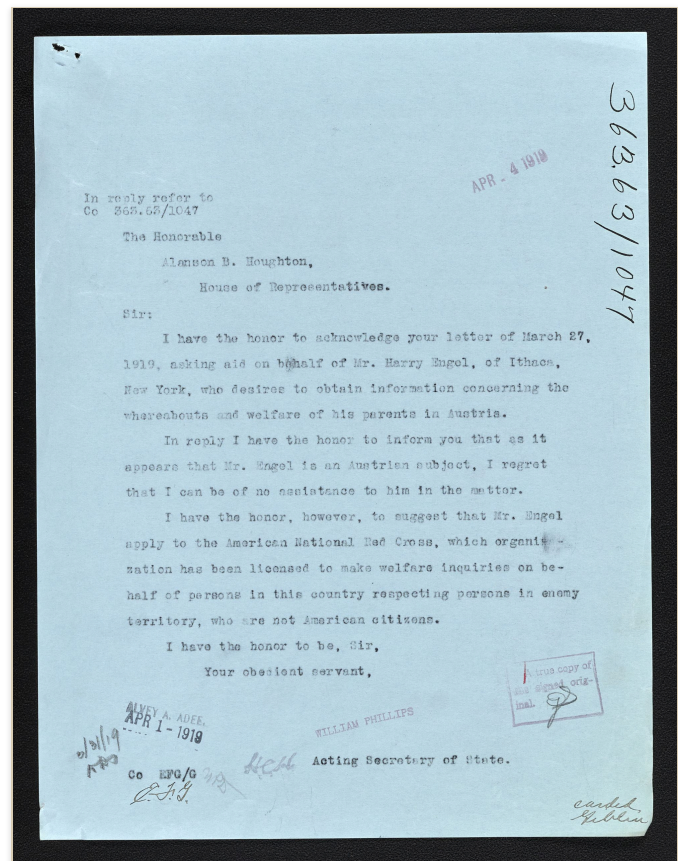
On **27 March 1919**, Representative **Alanson B. Houghton** of New York wrote to the Secretary of State, **Robert Lansing**, on Harry's behalf, vouching for him through an Ithaca newspaper publisher named M. V. Atwood, and asking the Department to find out what had become of his parents. The letter records the detail that would, a century later, confirm the family's origin:

“His father, Wolf Engel, is a man of about fifty years of age, and his home at Toporoutz, Chernowitz, Bukowina, Austria.”

The reply came quickly, and it was a closed door. On **4 April 1919**, Acting Secretary of State **William Phillips** answered that, because Harry was still an Austrian subject, the Department could give no assistance, and referred him instead to the American Red Cross, which was licensed to make welfare inquiries into former enemy territory on behalf of non-citizens.



Rep. Alanson B. Houghton to Secretary of State Robert Lansing, 27 March 1919.

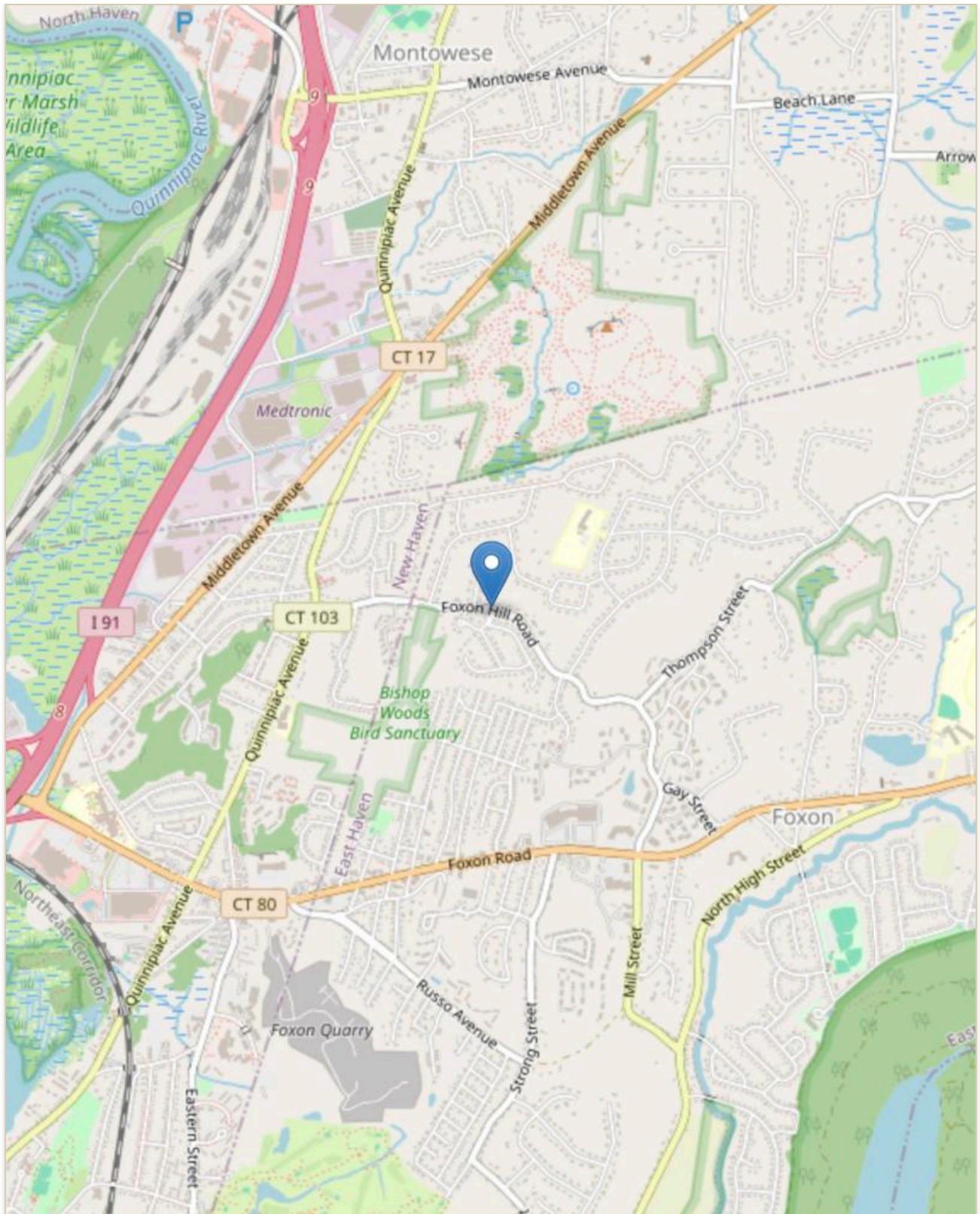


Acting Secretary of State William Phillips's reply, 4 April 1919.

State Department Central Decimal File 363.63/1047; U.S. National Archives, Record Group 59 (General Records of the Department of State); NARA catalog NAID 286793162. Located through the JewishGen index of Jewish names in RG59.

The farm in Foxon, East Haven

Harry settled on the land. He farmed the **Foxon** district of East Haven, Connecticut, on and around **Foxon Hill Road**, and married Jennie Green in Brooklyn on 29 May 1923. In the 1950 census he appears as the head of the last household on his enumerator's sheet: *“Engle, Harry H., age 54, born Austria, naturalized, manager of a rented farm, seventy hours a week.”*



Foxon Hill Road, in the Foxon section of East Haven, Connecticut, where Harry farmed. Map © OpenStreetMap contributors.

[illegible]

Form 1 **REGISTRATION CARD** No. **72**

1 Name in full **Harry Heinrich Engel** Age in yrs. **21**

2 Home address **Brownville, N.Y. 16** **114**

3 Date of birth **Jan. 12 1896**

4 Are you (1) a natural-born citizen, (2) a naturalized citizen, (3) an alien, (4) or have you declared your intention (specify which)? **No (1) No (2) Yes (3) Yes (4)**

5 Where were you born? **Popowitsky (Prov) Bukowina Austria**

6 If not a citizen, of what country are you a citizen or subject? **Austria**

7 What is your present trade, occupation, or office? **Farmer** **1**

8 By whom employed? **William Marley**
Where employed? **Brownville, N.Y. 16**

9 Have you a father, mother, wife, child under 12, or a sister or brother under 12, solely dependent on you for support (specify which)? **No**

10 Married or single (which)? **single** Race (specify which)? **Leucanian**

11 What military service have you had? Rank **No** branch

12 Do you claim exemption from draft (specify grounds)? **No**

I affirm that I have verified above answers and that they are true.

Harry Engel

If person is at least 18 years of age, he must sign name.

31-3-26-A

REGISTRAR'S REPORT

1 Tall, medium, or short (specify which)? **Tall** Slender, medium, or stout (which)? **Medium**

2 Color of eyes? **Brown** Color of hair? **Dark Brown** Bald? **No**

3 Has person lost arm, leg, hand, foot, or both eyes, or is he otherwise disabled (specify)? **No**

I certify that my answers are true, that the person registered has read his own answers, that I have witnessed his signature, and that all of his answers of which I have knowledge are true, except as follows:

L. J. Prime
(Signature of registrar)

Precinct **3rd Dist**
City or County **Tompkins**
State **New York**

June 5, 17
(Date of registration)

Harry Engel's World War I draft registration card, 1917.

What the records establish

- **Born** 12 January 1896 at Toporoutz, Bukovina, Austria (now Toporivtsi, Chernivtsi oblast, Ukraine).
- **Parents:** Wolf Engel (born about 1869, of Toporoutz) and Elka née Morgenstern.
- **Emigrated** from Hamburg on the *SS President Grant*, arriving Ellis Island 1 October 1913, age 17, last residence Boian, Bukovina.
- **Naturalization** begun with a Declaration of Intention, Tompkins County, New York, 18 October 1915.
- **1919:** petitioned the U.S. State Department, through Rep. Alanson B. Houghton, for news of his parents in war-torn Bukovina; assistance declined because he was still an Austrian subject.
- **Married** Jennie Green (née Grün), Brooklyn, 29 May 1923.
- **Farmed** the Foxon district of East Haven, Connecticut (Foxon Hill Road); recorded as a farm manager in the 1950 census.
- **Children:** Esther (married Aharon Shmuel Lamm; settled in Israel) and Elsie (married Morris Soffer, 1947).
- **Died** January 1983, Connecticut (Social Security Death Index, indexed under the farm spelling “Harry Engle”).

Sources: New York Passenger Arrival Lists (Ellis Island), 1 Oct 1913, image 2190-317; U.S. Declaration of Intention, Tompkins Co. N.Y., 1915; WWI draft registration, 1917; State Department Central Decimal File 363.63/1047 (NARA RG59, NAID 286793162); Brooklyn marriage affidavit no. 7851, 1923; 1950 U.S. Census, East Haven, Conn.; Social Security Death Index. Compiled for the Soffer family archive, 2026.