

Harry Engel: the answer of 1920

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New findings, October 2026, continuing “Harry (Heinrich) Engel: a life in records”

Harry’s documents and family tree: ouryichus.com



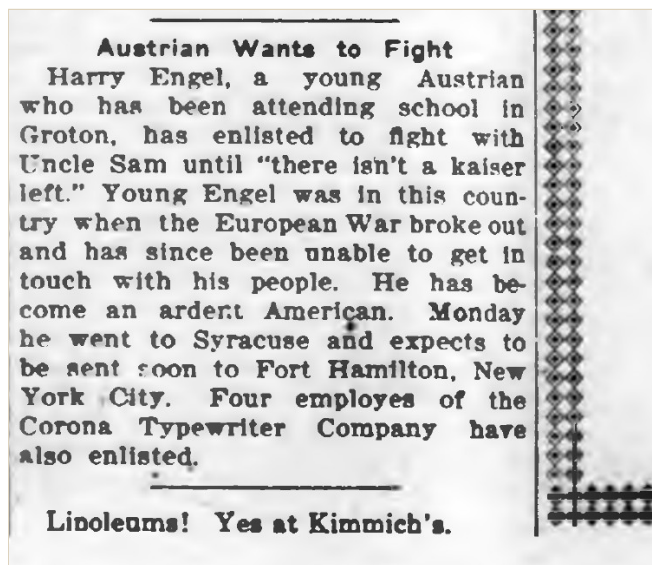
Harry Engel in the 1970s

The first account of Harry Engel ended in April 1919 with a closed door. Harry, a young farmhand from the Bukovina village of Toporoutz, had asked his congressman to find out whether his parents had survived the First World War, and the State Department had declined to help because he was not yet an American citizen. That record left the obvious question unanswered: did he ever learn what happened to them?

He did. The answer was printed on the front page of a small-town New York weekly in January 1920. This follow-up tells that story from the local newspapers, adds the documents found since the first account, corrects two details, and sets out what is and is not yet known about the fate of his parents.

“An ardent American,” 1917

The local papers of Tompkins County, New York, knew Harry well. He was working on farms around Groton and Freeville and attending Groton High School. When the United States entered the war in April 1917, he went straight to Syracuse to enlist. The Dryden Herald reported that he meant to fight “until there isn’t a kaiser left,” and noted that he had been unable to reach his family since the war began.



“Austrian Wants to Fight.” Dryden Herald, April 1917.

are at-	Austrian Boy Rejected	The
ily	Harry Engel, the Austrian boy who	money
re-	went from Groton last week to enlist	county
ith	and was accepted at the Syracuse re-	treasu
ex	cruiting office, was rejected after the	towns
le-	final physical examination at Fort	Caro
to	Slocum, because of a slight defect in	Dryde
er	hearing.	Ithaca
		887.50
	State Editors to Meet at Ithaca	809.95
	The next meeting of the New York	\$5,170.
	State Press Association will be held at	

“Austrian Boy Rejected.” Dryden Herald, the following week.

The Army accepted him at Syracuse, then turned him down at the final physical at Fort Slocum “because of a slight defect in hearing.” By 14 April he was back in Groton, “not having been accepted.” A few weeks later the school released him, with a group of local boys, to work the farms as a “farm cadet” for the war effort.

paper and rubbish.
 Harry Engel, who enlisted in the
 army has returned to this village, not
 having been accepted.
 The trustees of the Congregational
 Church are about to take up the mat-

Back in Groton. Ithaca Daily News, 14 April 1917, p. 3.

Groton, May 7.—The Groton Bridge
 Company has received orders to build
 a coal trestle and a girder bridge in
 Philadelphia and structural steel jobs
 in Rochester and Gloucester, N. J.
 The following pupils have been re-
 leased from the Groton High School
 and have been enrolled as farm
 cadets: Harry Engel, Walter Beach,
 Joseph Hester, Floyd Brong, John
 Carey, Irving Phipps, Andrew Carey,
 DR. DOMI
 ATT
 Amsterdam
 "The entire
 into the war
 son, who is
 autocrat fill
 bornness,"
 Theodor I
 Hungarian a

Enrolled as a farm cadet. Ithaca Daily News, 8 May 1917, p. 6.

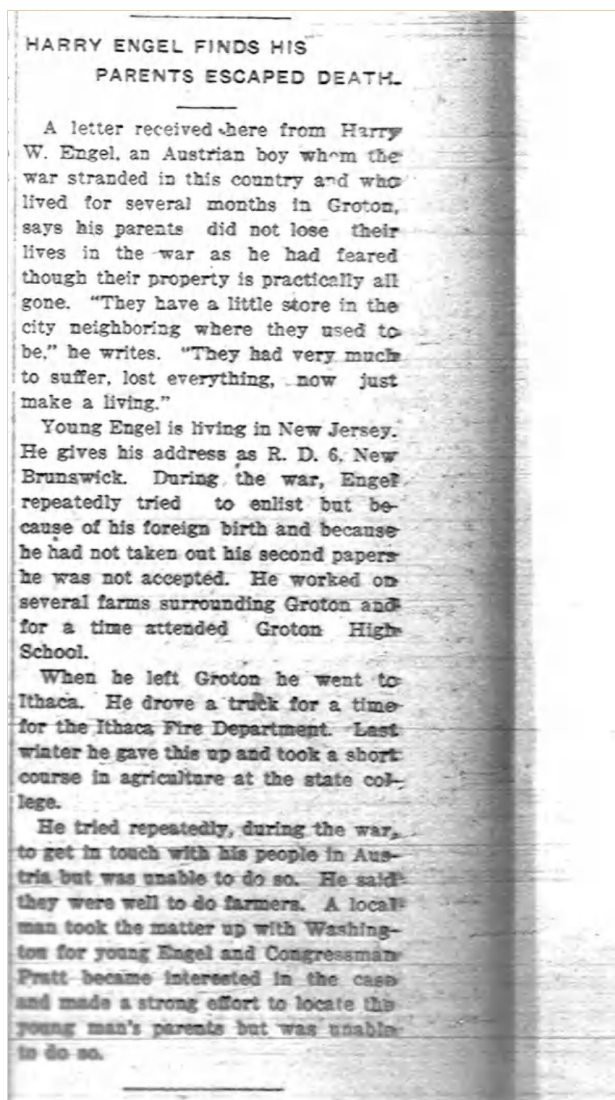
The man who vouched for him

The 1919 letter to the Secretary of State described Harry as “spoken of very highly by Mr. M. V. Atwood, publisher of one of the papers in my district.” The first account called Atwood an Ithaca publisher. He was in fact **Millard Van Marter Atwood**, born in Groton in 1886, a Cornell graduate, and the editor of the **Groton Journal and Courier**, the weekly that served the farms where Harry worked. Atwood later became an associate editor for the whole Gannett newspaper group.

The 1920 article below adds a second name. Before Representative Houghton’s letter of March 1919, “a local man took the matter up with Washington” and **Congressman Pratt** (Harry H. Pratt, who held the seat until March 1919) “made a strong effort to locate this young man’s parents but was unable to do so.” So there were at least two attempts through Congress, almost certainly pushed by Atwood.

The answer, 8 January 1920

Ten months after the State Department turned him away, Harry wrote to his friends in Groton with news. Atwood’s paper put it on the front page.



*Groton Journal and Courier, Thursday 8 January 1920,
page 1.*

HARRY ENGEL FINDS HIS PARENTS ESCAPED DEATH

A letter received here from Harry W. Engel, an Austrian boy whom the war stranded in this country and who lived for several months in Groton, says his parents did not lose their lives in the war as he had feared though their property is practically all gone. "They have a little store in the city neighboring where they used to be," he writes. "They had very much to suffer, lost everything, now just make a living."

Young Engel is living in New Jersey. He gives his address as R. D. 6, New Brunswick. During the war, Engel repeatedly tried to enlist but because of his foreign birth and because he had not taken out his second papers he was not accepted. He worked on several farms surrounding Groton and for a time attended Groton High School.

When he left Groton he went to Ithaca. He drove a truck for a time for the Ithaca Fire Department. Last winter he gave this up and took a short course in agriculture at the state college.

He tried repeatedly, during the war, to get in touch with his people in Austria but was unable to do so. He said they were well to do farmers. A local man took the matter up with Washington for young Engel and Congressman Pratt became interested in the case and made a strong effort to locate this young man's parents but was unable to do so.

The article fills in the years between the 1917 draft card and the 1923 marriage: Ithaca, a truck for the fire department, the winter short course in agriculture at the state college at Cornell, and by January 1920 a farm near New Brunswick, New Jersey. It also explains the training behind the East Haven farm he would run for the rest of his working life.

What the war did to Toporoutz

Harry's parents "lost everything" for a concrete reason. Toporoutz lay on the Bessarabian border and became a front line in the Russian winter offensive of January 1916. The Czernowitz German-language press reported repeated Russian assaults "between Toporoutz and Bojan" and described Toporoutz and its neighbor Rarancze as two small villages that stood "like two fortresses." A family of "well to do farmers" in that village would have lost house, land, and livestock.

The same newspapers name Jewish landholders called **Morgenstern** in Toporoutz: a fire at the farmstead of Joffel (Josef) Morgenstern in August 1894, and Srul Itzig Morgenstern, landholder, in 1904 and 1905.

Citizen, 1920

[illegible]

Later records

In 1942, at 46, Harry registered for the World War II “old man’s draft.” The card is in his own hand: Harry Henry Engle of Hill Street, off Thompson, in the Foxon section of East Haven; born 12 January 1896 at “Toporowitz, Austria”; self-employed on his farm; and the person who would always know his address, Jennie Engle.

REGISTRATION CARD—(Men born on or after April 28, 1877 and on or before February 16, 1897)

SERIAL NUMBER U 403	1. NAME (Print) Harry Henry Engle (First) (Middle) (Last)	ORDER NUMBER
2. PLACE OF RESIDENCE (Print) Hill St. (off Thompson) East Haven (Foxon) New Haven, Conn. (Number and street) (Town, township, village, or city) (County) (State)		
[THE PLACE OF RESIDENCE GIVEN ON THE LINE ABOVE WILL DETERMINE LOCAL BOARD JURISDICTION; LINE 2 OF REGISTRATION CERTIFICATE WILL BE IDENTICAL]		
3. MAILING ADDRESS Same (Mailing address if other than place indicated on line 2. If same insert word same)		
4. TELEPHONE 8-3509 (Exchange) (Number)	5. AGE IN YEARS 46 DATE OF BIRTH Jan. 12, 1896 (Mo.) (Day) (Yr.)	6. PLACE OF BIRTH Toporowitz Austria (Town or county) (State or country)
7. NAME AND ADDRESS OF PERSON WHO WILL ALWAYS KNOW YOUR ADDRESS Jennie Engle, Hill St., East Haven		
8. EMPLOYER'S NAME AND ADDRESS self-employed		
9. PLACE OF EMPLOYMENT OR BUSINESS Hill St., (Foxon) East Haven, New Haven, Conn. (Number and street or R. F. D. number) (Town) (County) (State)		
I AFFIRM THAT I HAVE VERIFIED ABOVE ANSWERS AND THAT THEY ARE TRUE.		
D. S. S. Form 1 (Revised 4-1-42)	16-21630-2	Harry H. Engle (Registrant's signature)

World War II draft registration, East Haven, 1942, signed "Harry H. Engle."

Correction. The first account gave Harry's death as January 1983 in Connecticut. The Social Security Death Index places his last residence in **Brooklyn, New York (ZIP 11210, Midwood/Flatbush)**; his card had been issued in Connecticut. Jennie died in November 1969 with a last residence in **Far Rockaway, Queens**. In their last years both had left the farm for New York, near their daughters. Neither is buried at Beth Moses Cemetery with Elsie and Morris Soffer; their graves have not yet been found.

Did he see his parents again?

The paper trail after January 1920 is silent. Harry never applied for a U.S. passport in the years those applications survive (to 1925), no return voyage has been found, and neither Wolf nor Elka appears in any American record. Nothing shows a reunion. The likeliest picture is a correspondence by letter between the farm in Connecticut and a small store near Czernowitz.

The family itself supplies one firm answer. Ashkenazi Jews name children only after relatives who have died. Harry's younger daughter Elsie, born on 24 April 1929, carried the Hebrew name **Elka Rachel bas Sheindel Pessel**: Elka for her father's mother, and "daughter of Sheindel Pessel," her mother Jennie's Hebrew name (the "P" in "Jennie P. Engel"). So **Elka Engel née Morgenstern had died before April 1929**, less than ten years after Harry learned she had survived the war.

What became of Wolf Engel

Elka died before April 1929. Wolf's death has not yet been found. The search so far:

Source searched	Result
Czernowitz Jewish burial register, 1860–1947 (about 21,000 burials, JewishGen)	No Wolf (Zeev) or Elka Engel.
Czernowitz city civil death registers and indexes, 1930–1933 (the only years filmed)	No Wolf or Elka. Engels who died: Rifca, 48 (1930); Alfred, 74, and Perl, 70 (1932).
Bukovina Jewish cemetery index (Suceava, Radautz and others)	One Zeev (Wolf) Engel, died 4 May 1935 at 73, Suceava, son of Yechiel-Michal. Ruled out: he was the husband of Dora, not Elka.
Yad Vashem, Czernowitz lists of 1942–1944	Three possible Wolf Engels, none yet tied to Toporoutz (below).

Possible Wolf Engel	What the record says
Born 4 January 1862	Living in Czernowitz in 1942 at Str. Macedonieii 6, on a list of Jews over the age of seventy. If this is Harry's father, he survived the deportations of 1941.
Son of David	In the Czernowitz ghetto; listed as a survivor in August 1944.
Son of Itzik	Deported to Transnistria; listed as a survivor in August 1944.

The key that would decide between them is Wolf's own father's name, which has not yet been found. Toporoutz's own civil registers, and the Czernowitz death registers for 1919–1929 and 1934–1940, were never microfilmed and survive only at the State Archive of Chernivtsi Oblast in Ukraine.

Still being pursued

- **National Archives, Washington:** Harry's 1920 naturalization petition, which should give his parents' residence in 1920 and explain why he was naturalized in Washington.
- **Town of Groton historian:** the Groton Journal for 1914–1919, which is not online and probably holds more about Harry.
- **Yad Vashem:** the original 1942 Czernowitz list naming Wolf Engel, born 1862.
- **U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services:** index searches for Harry's and Jennie's naturalization files, filed October 2026.
- **Not yet requested:** Harry's Social Security application (it names his parents in his own words); the Chernivtsi archive for Wolf's death and for Elka's, now narrowed to the 1920s; and the family's own memories, letters and photographs, which may answer the reunion question faster than any archive.

Sources. Dryden Herald (Dryden, N.Y.), April 1917, "Austrian Wants to Fight" and "Austrian Boy Rejected"; Ithaca Daily News, 14 April 1917 p. 3 and 8 May 1917 p. 6; Groton Journal and Courier, 8 January 1920 p. 1 (all via Old Fulton NY Post Cards, fultonhistory.com). Czernowitzer Tagblatt, 6 and 21 January 1916; Bukowinaer Rundschau, 15 August 1894; Czernowitzer Zeitung, 29 October 1904; Czernowitzer Tagblatt, 17 October 1905 (Austrian National Library, ANNO). Petition for Naturalization of Jennie Engel, New Haven, no. 17342. U.S. World War II Draft Registration Cards, 1942, East Haven, Conn. Social Security Death Index (Harry Engel, d. Jan. 1983; Jennie Engel, d. Nov. 1969). JewishGen Online Worldwide Burial Registry (Bukovina). Czernowitz civil registration, deaths 1930–1933, State Archive of Chernivtsi Oblast fond 1245 opis 3 (FamilySearch film). Yad Vashem Central Database of Shoah Victims' Names, items 10519347, 6497516, 6498459. Wellwood–Beth Moses Cemetery interment search. U.S. Passport Applications, 1795–1925 (FamilySearch). Compiled for the Soffer family archive, October 2026. The full archive, with every document above and the family tree, is at ouryichus.com.