

**A HEARTFELT STORY OF NICHOLAS WINTON WHO SAVED 669 CHILDREN  
FROM DEATH DURING THE HOLOCAUST DURING WW2**

**340**

**(THIS ARTICLE IS IN 2 PARTS)**



Sir Nicholas George Winton MBE (né Wertheim; 19 May 1909 - 1 July 2015) was a British banker and humanitarian who established an organization to rescue children at risk from Nazi Germany. Born to German-Jewish parents who had emigrated to Britain at the beginning of the 20th century, Winton **supervised the rescue of 669 children**, most of them Jewish, from Czechoslovakia on the eve of World War II. Winton found homes for the children and arranged for their safe passage to Britain. **This operation was later known as the Czech Kindertransport** (German for "children's transport").

**THE SUM OF IT ALL**

**Copy and paste the below link into your browser**

**<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c0aoifNziKQ>**

His work went unnoticed by the world for nearly 50 years, until 1988 when he was invited to the BBC television program *That's Life!* where he was reunited with several of the children he had saved. The British press celebrated him and dubbed him the "British Schindler." **In 2003, Winton was knighted by Queen Elizabeth II for "services to humanity, in saving Jewish children from Nazi Germany occupied Czechoslovakia"**. On 28 October 2014, he was awarded **the highest honor of the Czech Republic**, the Order of the White Lion (1st class), by Czech President Miloš Zeman. **He died in 2015 at the age of 106.**

**EARLY LIFE**

Winton was born on 19 May 1909 in Hampstead, London to Jewish parents Rudolph Wertheim (1881-1937), a bank manager, and his wife Barbara (née Wertheimer, 1888-1978 as the middle-born of their three children. His elder sister was Charlotte (1908-2001) and his younger brother, Robert (1914-2009).] His parents were German Jews who had moved to London two years earlier. The family name was Wertheim, but they changed it to Winton in an effort at integration. They also converted to Christianity, and Winton was baptized.

In 1923, Winton entered Stowe School, which had just opened. He left without qualifications, attending night school while volunteering at the Midland Bank.

He then went to Hamburg, where he worked at Behrens Bank, followed by Wasserman Bank in Berlin. In 1931, he moved to France and worked for the Banque Nationale de Crédit in Paris. He also earned a banking qualification in France. Returning to London, he became a broker at the London Stock Exchange.

Though a stockbroker, Winton was also "an ardent socialist who became close to Labor Party luminaries Aneurin Bevan, Jennie Lee and Tom Driberg.

Through another socialist friend, Martin Blake, *Winton became part of a left-wing circle opposed to appeasement and concerned about the dangers posed by the Nazis.*

At school, he had become an outstanding fencer and was selected for the British team in 1938. He had hoped to compete in the following Olympics, but the games were canceled because of the war.

Shortly before Christmas 1938, Winton was planning to travel to Switzerland for a skiing holiday. He decided instead to visit Prague and help Martin Blake, who was in Prague as an associate of the British Committee for Refugees from Czechoslovakia, then in the process of being occupied by Germany, and had called Winton to ask him to assist in Jewish welfare work. Winton established an organization to aid children from Jewish families at risk from the Nazis. *He set up his office at a dining room table in his hotel in Wenceslas Square.*

In November 1938, following Kristallnacht in Nazi-ruled Germany, the House of Commons approved a measure to allow the entry into Britain of refugees younger than 17, provided they had a place to stay and a warranty of £50 was deposited for their eventual return to their own country.

#### THE NETHERLANDS

An important obstacle was getting official permission to cross into the Netherlands, as the children were to embark on the ferry at Hook of Holland. After Kristallnacht in November 1938, the Dutch government officially closed its borders to any Jewish refugees. The Dutch police, the marechaussee, searched for them and returned any found to Germany, despite the horrors of Kristallnacht being well known.



#### **60 MINUTES: SIR NICHOLAS WINTON "SAVING THE CHILDREN"**

**COPY AND PASTE THE BELOW LINK INTO YOUR BROWSER**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c0aoifNziKQ>

Winton succeeded; thanks to the guarantees he had obtained from Britain. After the first train, the process of crossing the Netherlands went smoothly. Winton ultimately found homes in Britain for 669 children, many of whose parents would perish in the Auschwitz concentration camp. His mother worked with him to place the children in homes and later little hostels. Throughout the summer of 1939, he placed photographs of the children in Picture Post seeking families to accept them.

By coincidence, the names of the London and North Eastern Railway steamers that operated the Harwich to Hook of Holland route included Prague and Vienna; the former can be seen in a 1938 Pathé newsreel.



*Children arriving in London from Prague.*

He also wrote to U.S. politicians such as President Franklin D. Roosevelt, asking them to take more children. **The United States took none.**

**To hear about the letter to President Roosevelt copy and paste the below link into your browser**  
**[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W\\_3mQFIMz0Y](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W_3mQFIMz0Y)**

**See additional information concerning these letters and actual copies in Part 2**



*Nicholas Winton with some of the children he saved*

**He said that two thousand more might have been saved if they had helped**, but only Sweden took any besides those sent to Britain. The last group of 250, scheduled to leave Prague on 1 September 1939, were unable to depart. With Hitler's invasion of Poland on the same day, the Second World War had begun. **Of the children due to leave on that train, only two survived the war.**

Winton acknowledged the vital roles in Prague of Doreen Warriner, Trevor Chadwick, Nicholas Stopford, Beatrice Wellington (born 15 June 1907), Josephine Pike, and Bill Barazetti (1914-2000), who also worked to evacuate children from Europe. Winton was in Prague for only about three weeks before the Nazis occupied the country. He never set foot in Prague Station. He later wrote that "Chadwick did the more difficult and dangerous work after the Nazis invaded... he deserves all praise".

**Of the 669 children saved from the Holocaust through Winton's efforts, more than 370 have never been traced.** BBC News suggested in 2015 that they may not know the full story **of how they survived the war.**

## THE SECOND WORLD WAR

After the outbreak of World War II, Winton applied successfully for registration as a conscientious objector and later served with the Red Cross.



*Nicholas Winton (center) with colleagues in the Ambulance Service during the Second World War*

In 1940, he rescinded his objections and joined the Royal Air Force, Administrative and Special Duties Branch. He was an aircraftman, rising to sergeant by the time he was commissioned on 22 June 1944 as an acting pilot officer on probation.

On 17 August 1944, he was promoted to pilot officer on probation. He was promoted to the rank of war substantive flying officer on 17 February 1945. He relinquished his commission on 19 May 1954, retaining the honorary rank of flight lieutenant.

## WHEN THE WAR ENDED

After the war, Winton worked for the International Refugee Organization and then the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development in Paris, where he met Grete Gjelstrup, a Danish secretary and accountant's daughter. They married in her hometown of Vejle on 31 October 1948.

The family insisted that their son Robin stay with them rather than be sent to a residential home. Robin's death from meningitis, the day before his sixth birthday, affected Winton greatly and he founded a local support organization which became Maidenhead Mencap. Winton stood, unsuccessfully, for the town council in 1954; he later found work in the finance departments of various companies.

## RECOGNITION



*Nicholas Winton @ 29*

It has been reported Winton suppressed his humanitarian exploits for many years; however, he mentioned them in his election material while unsuccessfully standing for election to the Maidenhead town council in 1954. **His rescue achievements went unnoticed for half a century until in 1988 his wife found a detailed scrapbook in their attic, containing lists of the children, including their parents' names and the names and addresses of the families that took them in.** She gave the scrapbook to Elisabeth Maxwell, a Holocaust researcher and wife of media magnate Robert Maxwell. Winton himself could not remember the reason why this was done. **Letters were sent to each of these known addresses and 80 of "Winton's children" were found in Britain.**



*A page from his scrapbook*

In an interview on the BBC radio program The Life Scientific, Simon Wessely described how his father Rudi, one of the rescued children, had a chance encounter with Winton. **The wider world found out about his work in February 1988 during an episode of the BBC television program That's Life!** when he was invited as a member of the audience. At one point, Winton's scrapbook was shown and his achievements were explained.

**Video of the BBC show "That's Life"**

**To view copy and paste the below link into your browser**

**<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PKkgO06bAZk>**

The host of the program, **Esther Rantzen, asked whether anybody in the audience owed their lives to Winton, and if so, to stand: more than two dozen people surrounding Winton rose and applauded. Ms Rantzen then asked if anyone present was the child or grandchild of one of the children Winton saved. The rest of the audience stood.**

#### **CELEBRATING 100 YEARS**

To celebrate his 100th birthday, Winton flew over the White Waltham Airfield in a microlight **piloted by Judy Leden, the daughter of one of the boys he saved.** His birthday was also marked by the publication of a profile in The Jewish Chronicle.

**Winton died in his sleep on the morning of 1 July 2015 at Wexham Park Hospital in Slough from cardio-respiratory failure,** having been admitted a week earlier following a deterioration in his health. **He was 106 years old.** Winton was survived by his son, Nicholas, and his daughter, Barbara.

**Winton's death came 76 years to the day after 241 of the children he saved left Prague on a train.**

A special report from BBC News on several of the children whom Winton rescued during the war had been published earlier that day.





In 2003 he was knighted for services to humanity, in recognition of his work on the Czech Kindertransport.



*Kindertransport statues, Liverpool Street Station, London*

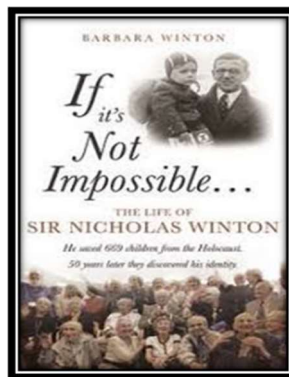


***There are also three memorials (above) at Liverpool Street Station in London,*** where the Kindertransport children arrived In September 2010, another statue of Winton was unveiled, this time at Maidenhead railway station by Home Secretary Theresa May, MP for Maidenhead.

Created by Lydia Karpinska, it depicts Winton sitting on a bench and reading a book.



Barbara Winton has written a biography of her father "If it's not impossible - the life of Sir Nicholas Winton". The book & E-book is available from [www.amazon.co.uk](http://www.amazon.co.uk)



INTERVIEW WITH DAUGHTER – BARBARA WINTON

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IQa9T6lpAgo>

The headboard worn by No. 60163 Tornado from Harwich to Liverpool Street station, the final leg of the Winton Train from Prague.



On 1 September 2009, a special "Winton Train" composed of one or two steam locomotives (out of a set of six) and carriages used in the 1930s set off from the Prague Main railway station for London via the original Kindertransport route. On board were several surviving "Winton children" and their descendants, who were welcomed by Winton in London.



The occasion marked the 70th anniversary of the final intended Kindertransport arranged by Winton, due to set off on 1 September 1939 but prevented by the outbreak of the Second World War that very day. At the train's departure, a memorial statue for Winton, designed by Flor Kent, was unveiled at the railway station. (Also seen above + below).



A steam train has made a special stop in Maidenhead as a tribute to Sir Nicholas Winton, who saved hundreds of children from the Nazis.

**He died on the anniversary of the departure of a train in 1939 carrying the largest number of children - 241.**





***Here, once again, is proof that the good do not necessarily die young.***

The Nobel Prize recipient and Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel, a man who has dedicated his life to ensuring that none of us forget what happened to the Jews at the hands of the Nazis, wrote these words that could easily describe Nicholas Winton:

*"In those times there was darkness everywhere. In heaven and on earth, all the gates of compassion seemed to have been closed. The killer killed and the Jews died and the outside world adopted an attitude either of complicity or indifference. Only a few dared to care. These few men and women were vulnerable, afraid, and helpless – what made them different from their fellow citizens? ... Why were there so few? ... Let us remember: What hurts the victim most is not the cruelty of the oppressor but the silence of the bystander.... Let us not forget, after all, there is always a moment when moral choice is made.... And so we must know these good people who helped Jews during the Holocaust. We must learn from them, and in gratitude and hope, we must remember them."*

***Nicholas Winton was one of those good people. And now you know his story.***

To view Mr. Winton's scrapbook and some pages from it copy and paste the below link into your browser.

<https://www.cbsnews.com/pictures/inside-nicholas-wintons-scrapbook/>

## **PART 2**

### **NICHOLAS WINTON AND THE REFUGEE CHILDREN**

**A FOLLOW-UP TO "60 MINUTES" PROGRAM DATED APR 27, 2014**

**FROM THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES**



Today's post was written by David Langbart, Archivist at the National Archives in College Park on April 30, 2014

The April 27, 2014, broadcast of the CBS news show "60 Minutes" included a segment entitled "Saving the Children." (Video also included in part 1)

To view. Copy and paste the below link into your browser

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c0aoifNziKQ>

It recounted the efforts of Nicholas Winton, a British citizen, to save almost 700 Czechoslovakian children, mostly Jewish, from the Nazi German occupation.

Correspondent Bob Simon interviewed Mr. Winton, who is now 104 years old. During their discussion, Simon asked Winton if he had approached countries other than England to accept children. Winton replied that he wrote to the United States, but that America would not accept any of the children. Simon explained that Winton wrote to President Franklin D. Roosevelt and received a reply from the U.S. embassy in London explaining that the U.S. was "unable" to help.

Winton's letter is now in the National Archives. the agency responsible for preserving the permanently valuable records of the U.S. Government. The White House referred it to the Department of State for action shortly after receipt. It was ultimately filed in the Department's original file on the issue of refugees displaced by persecution and war in Europe.

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**BRITISH COMMITTEE for REFUGEES from CZECHOSLOVAKIA**  
**CHILDREN'S SECTION**

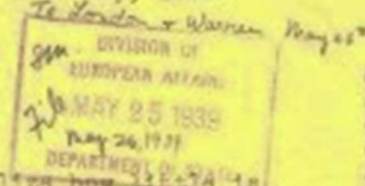
Telephone: MUSEum 2900 Ext. 217 DEPARTMENT OF STATE  
NW/RR.

BLOOMSBURY HOUSE,  
Room 217,  
BLOOMSBURY STREET,  
LONDON, W.C.1.

President Franklin D. Roosevelt  
Washington, D.C.,  
U.S.A.

*M. M. Dwyer*

16th May, 1939.



Esteemed Sir,

Perhaps people in America do not realize how ~~little~~ <sup>much</sup> is being and has been done for refugee children in Czechoslovakia. They have to depend entirely on private guarantors to get into England, which means that somebody has to take full responsibility for maintenance, upkeep, and education, until they are 18 years of age. No other country is taking an interest in them except for Sweden, which took 35 children last February. We at this office have case-papers and photos of over 5000 children, quite apart from a further 10,000 whom we estimate have to register. Actually, so far, we have brought only about 120 into England.

In Bohemia and Slovakia to-day, there are thousands of children, some homeless and starving, mostly without nationality, but they certainly all have one thing in common: there is no future, if they are forced to remain where they are. Their parents are forbidden work and the children are forbidden schooling, and apart from the physical discomforts, which all this signifies, the moral degradation is immeasurable. Yet since Munich, hardly anything has been done for the children in Czechoslovakia. Many of the children are quite destitute having had to move more than once since they originally fled from Germany.

Is it possible for anything to be done to help us with this problem in America? It is hard to state our case forcibly in a letter, but we trust to your imagination to realize how desperately urgent the situation is.

Believe me, Esteemed Sir, with many thanks,

Your obedient Servant,

*Nicholas Winton*  
HON. SEC.

B40.48 REFUGEES/1635

FILED

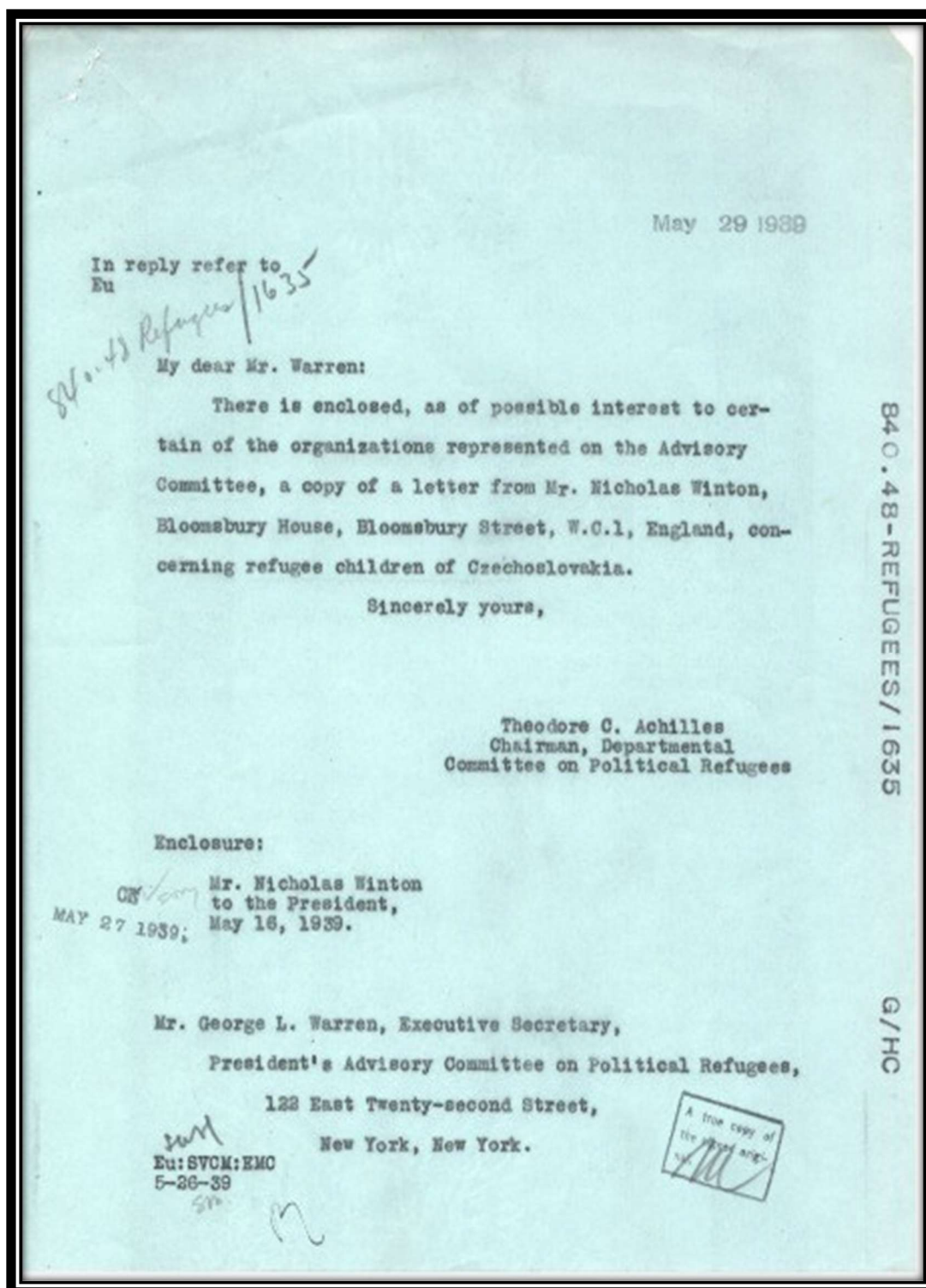
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*Nicholas Winton's to President Franklin D. Roosevelt*

Included in the file with Winton's letter is the documentation of the Department's limited follow-up. The Department took two steps:



First, it forwarded a copy of the letter to George L. Warren, Executive Secretary of the President's Advisory Committee on Political Refugees. The Department suggested that organizations represented by the Committee might be interested.



May 29 1939

In reply refer to  
Eu

840.48 Refugees/1635

My dear Mr. Warren:

There is enclosed, as of possible interest to certain of the organizations represented on the Advisory Committee, a copy of a letter from Mr. Nicholas Winton, Bloomsbury House, Bloomsbury Street, W.C.1, England, concerning refugee children of Czechoslovakia.

Sincerely yours,

Theodore C. Achilles  
Chairman, Departmental  
Committee on Political Refugees

840.48-REFUGEES/1635

Enclosure:

Mr. Nicholas Winton  
to the President,  
May 16, 1939.  
MAY 27 1939; CH

Mr. George L. Warren, Executive Secretary,  
President's Advisory Committee on Political Refugees,  
123 East Twenty-second Street,  
New York, New York.

Eu:SVCM:EMC  
5-26-39

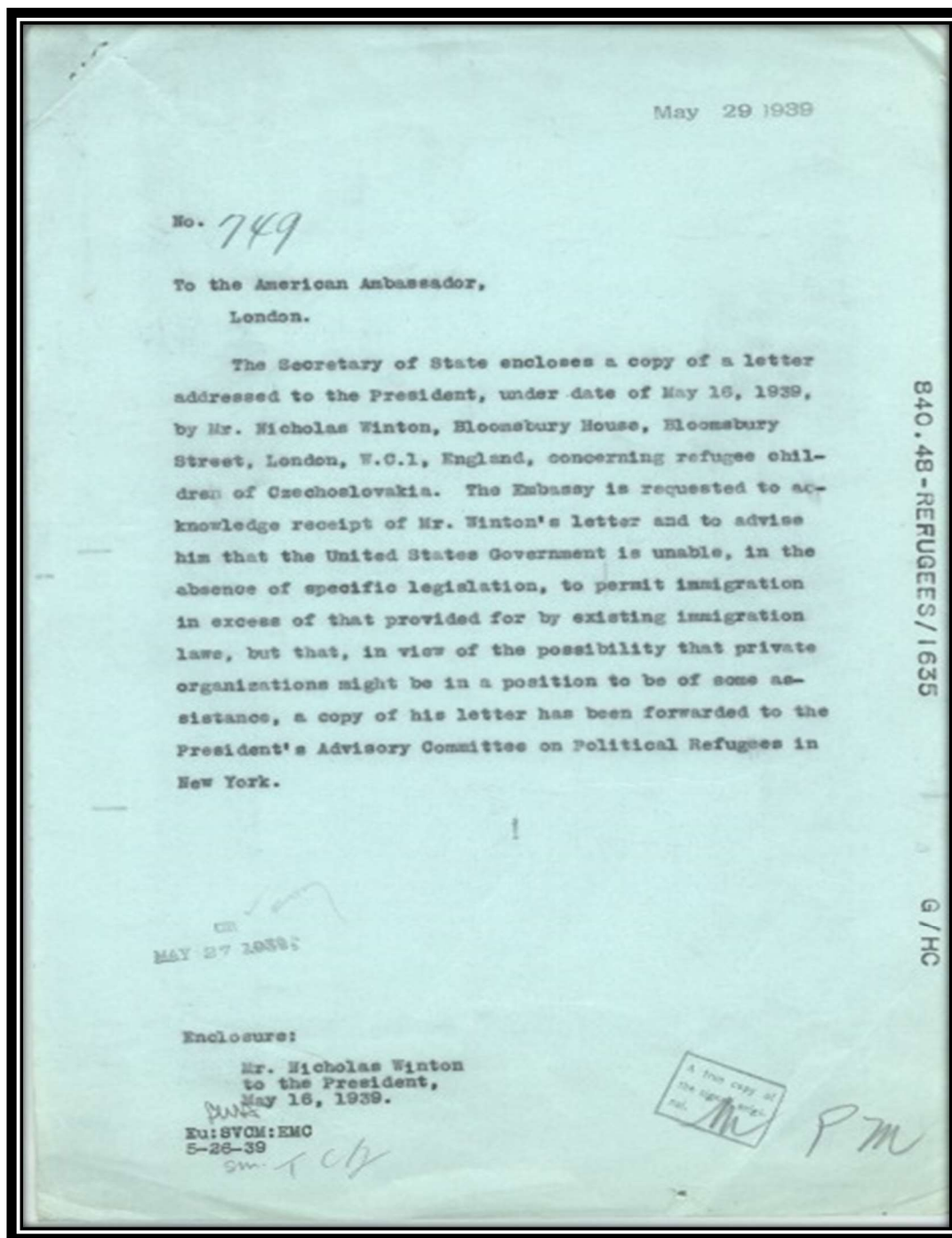


G/HC

Theodore C. Achilles, Chairman to George L. Warren, Executive Secretary, President's Advisory Committee on Political Refugees



Second, it sent the U.S. embassy in London a copy of the letter with the instruction to acknowledge receipt of the letter and "to advise him that the United States Government is unable, in the absence of specific legislation, to permit immigration above that provided for by existing immigration laws," but that the letter had been forwarded to the President's Advisory Committee on Political Refugees since private organizations might be of help.



*Dispatch No. 749 to the American Ambassador, London*

Source: All documents come from File 840.48 Refugees, [1930-39 Central Decimal File \(National Archives Identifier 302021\)](#), Record Group 59, General Records of the Department of State, National Archives, College Park.

The entirety of the "840.48 Refugee" file is on rolls 19-70 of National Archives Microfilm Publication M1284: Records of the Department of State Relating to the Problems of Relief and Refugees in Europe Arising from World War II and Its Aftermath, 1938-1949.

#### **SOME QUOTES OF SIR NICHOLAS WINTON**



It gets a bit boring talking about the same thing for a hundred years

I wasn't heroic because I was never in danger.

I know crowds of people who go to church and the synagogue who aren't religious respond very easily to outside events. One's life is a matter of chance. Nothing that you've arranged for yourself works out.

I've always enjoyed doing work that intrudes or helps people.

Ever since I was quite young, I was in St. John's Ambulance or the Red Cross; latterly, I've been involved in voluntary work with the mentally handicapped and Abbeyfield Old People's Homes.

Everyone thinks my story should be marked by heroism, but there was no risk to myself. You see, no one in Prague at that time thought they were going to be at war with England.

Some people revel in taking risks, and some go through life taking no risks at all.

I work on the motto that if something's not impossible, there must be a way to do it.



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