

---

Charles Albert Converse Papers, 1939-1940  
MS/158/ER1/015

---

November 11, 1939

Converse, Charles Albert.  
Report on Evacuation of U.S.  
Citizens.

United States. Embassy (Great Britain).

---

For this and additional works see: <https://vtext.valdosta.edu/xmlui/handle/10428/3016>

UUID: F6E83244-0D10-4B8B-4BD4-632B739AE2DF

**Recommended Citation:**

Converse, Charles Albert. Report on Evacuation of U.S. Citizens. American Embassy, London, November 11, 1939. Valdosta State University Archives and Special Collections, Charles Albert Converse Papers, 1939-1940 [ms158er1-015]. <http://hdl.handle.net/10428/3033>.

This item is free and open source. It is part of the *Charles Albert Converse Papers, 1939-1940*, at Odum Library Valdosta State University Archives and Special Collections. If you have any questions or concerns, contact [archives@valdosta.edu](mailto:archives@valdosta.edu)

*prepared for Nov 11, 1939*

On August 23rd. several days prior to Germany's entry into Poland a new section was set up in the Embassy for the purpose of dealing with the large numbers of American citizens who had begun to pour into the office for advice; as well, as to register, and carefully index all of our citizens who had not previously registered with us. Proper and efficient registration, assembling such data as passport details, nearest of kin in the United States, local addresses, and immediate plans was essential for the proper protection of our citizens, as well as to be in a position to communicate with each one immediately in the event that an emergency in the nature of a forced evacuation should become necessary.

This section started from a nucleus of one officer and four clerks but rapidly expanded in order to cope with the pressure of callers, the telephone and telegrams to ten officers and fourteen clerks. The normal closing hours were naturally forgotten and the staff was on duty from nine in the morning until ten in the evening virtually without a break.

During the first day of the emergency the newly formed section handled over twelve hundred callers, the majority of whom, although anxious to return to the United States at the earliest possible moment, were calm and anxious to cause as little difficulty as possible. There were, however, cases of hysteria and unreasonableness, which is only to be expected at such a trying time.

The sinking of the s.s. Athenia on September 4th. the day following the declaration of war made our problem even more complicated. American citizens who the previous week had been quite happy with their bookings on belligerent vessels were now anxious to transfer to neutral flag ships, preferably American boats. Then too, the cessation of the German steamship service not only necessitated the finding of new bookings but also presented a real financial problem to a number of our citizens.

We had estimated the number of American citizens in Great Britain and Northern Ireland at 14000. This estimate was based on our figure of 6300 registrants

in the London consular district and on quickly assembled statistics from the other consular offices. Our estimate was subsequently proven to be essentially correct, and the Secretary of State for Home Affairs, in the House of Commons gave the figure of 13,665 United States citizens registered in the United Kingdom as from September 1938 to September 3, 1939.

During the four weeks following August 24th., approximately ten thousand American citizens sailed from British ports en route to the United States. According to the latest figures there are still approximately four thousand citizens still remaining who for business, family or other reasons have been unable to depart for the United States.

A careful check of all departures has been kept and the registration files of American citizens in the London consular district is believed to be very complete and correct.

The question of exit permits required by the British Government as from September the 16th also proved to be a stubborn problem, but the British Passport and Permit Office were extremely helpful and anxious to cooperate wherever possible. Through the good offices of the Embassy, the requirement for exit permits was waived for the sailings in early September of the Harding, Washington and a number of other vessels leaving British ports with a full complement of American passengers. Throughout the entire emergency the Permit Office has done everything possible to facilitate the departure of American citizens with as little trouble to the individual as possible.

In addition to exit permits, American citizens, as well as others, were required and still are required, to secure permits in order to export their funds from England. The question of exchange in the early weeks of the Exchange Regulations enforcement was troublesome, but the American banks at this junction did everything possible to expedite the issuance of exchange permits so that no one would be penalised to the extent of missing a sailing. Although, as I have already mentioned, the vast majority of the six thousand callers during the

first/

first week of the emergency kept their emotions well in hand. Naturally a number of humorous and rather pathetic incidences occurred. One young female blue-beard, who was currently living with her sixth husband, rushed in for transportation, exclaiming that she was quite ready and anxious to leave not only her sixth, but also the five previous husbands who were English, to take her chances on doing better back home. One very game lady who had seen at least 65 summers, said that she was not afraid to remain in England, in fact she had definitely decided to do so. She had enjoyed many years of hospitality from the British and she would stay here and would offer her services for what ever they were worth.

A party of eight young cyclists quite indifferent to the fact that bombing might commence at any moment were starting out gaily to complete their itinerary as planned.

The necessity for returning home worked a hardship in a number of cases. One that was outstanding was that of two theatrical troupes who had after a long dry spell at home finally landed an excellent contract to appear on the London variety stage. They had, at the time of their call, just been advised that their show would not go on and so they were forced to turn their backs on what might have been a real opportunity, to return home unemployed.

The knowledge that the families of the officers of the Embassy were remaining in England helped to calm many who were inclined to be a bit hysterical. I know of no instance where, after having sought the advice of the Embassy that the individual did not become reconciled to the situation and anxious to cooperate and make our already arduous task as easy as possible.

C.A. Converse.



November 11, 1939.