

## Project N.O.M.E.S.

*Project of the Grouping of Schools in Vilela (Paredes) between 2008 and 2017 and by the Grouping de Escolas da Maia from the 2019/2020 school year on the teaching and memory of the Shoá (Holocaust) through human reports, so that it can be understood that it is not of numbers, but that it is more about human beings, when the "Final Solution of the Jewish problem" was perpetrated by the Nazis.*

### Michael Spett: How My Father's Luck and Ingenuity Saved Us



Figures 1 and 2. Henri (Henry) Chaim Spett and Lizzi Spett, s/d. (Source: <http://sousamendesfoundation.org/family/spett>)

Henri (Henry) Chaim Spett was born in Kraków in 1898, his family emigrated to Germany and settled in Wiesbaden in 1900. In 1916 Henry volunteered for the Austro-Hungarian army after attending the Oberrealschule, having completed his high school diploma in 1917 at officer candidate school. As Lizzi Spett, his future wife, points out in a written

testimony left to his family, Henry was wounded twice during the First World War, first in the Carpathian Mountains, then again in the Italian Alps. After the war he studied economics in Vienna and Frankfurt am Main, among others with Max Weber [1].

Lizzi Spett, maiden name Dreifuss, was born in Heidelberg, Germany on August 10, 1906 Lizzi and Henry got to know each other at the time Lizzi was taking care of her sister Heddy, who ended up dying of tuberculosis. In September 1924 she went to work as a secretary in the printing plant that Henry founded in January 1923, the Westdruckerei, in Wiesbaden. The company escaped the effects of the German hyperinflation by producing wine labels for regional wineries and so, with the help of those orders from France, got paid in hard currency French Francs.. From 1925 onward, the Westdruckerei became a GmbH (a limited liability company) with “Spett as managing director and printed publications on Jewish topics, but also internationally sought-after work on regional viticulture” [1].

As Lizzi reports in her testimony, with the rise of the Nazis to power in Germany in 1933, Michael's father, Henry Spett, who was a Jew and the proud owner of a printing plant where he printed various Jewish periodicals and anti-Nazi material, began to have problems with the National Socialist authorities. For this reason, Henry became a very eminent target for the Nazis, given that Hitler had ordered the closure of all printing presses of Jewish origin. One night Henry Spett received a call from a friend belonging to the police force, who recommended an escape from the city, because the next day Michael's father would likely be arrested by the German police under a court confiscating his plant. Henry decided to flee, first for Antwerp, where some months later Lizzi managed to follow him, much to her great regret that the adverse circumstances forced her to leave her mother and an aunt. Lizzi and Henry soon ended up getting married on November 19, 1933 in Antwerp and Michael Spett was born, in Brussels, on August 14, 1934.

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[1] <https://www.wiesbaden.de/microsite/stadtlexikon/a-z/spett-henry-c..php>



Figures 3 and 4. Brothers Michael and Gabrielle Rose Spett, s/d. (Source: <http://sousamendesfoundation.org/family/spett>)

Still based on Lizzi Spett's testimony, which was kindly given to us by Michael Spett, Henry Spett restarted his printing business in Belgium, buying a small company that became "Alliance Graphic." Lizzi's mother even visited the couple in Brussels and, as anti-Semitic measures in Germany worsened, the Spetts begin to receive children sent through the «Kindertransports». On August 1, 1937, the couple's second daughter, Gabrielle Rose Spett, was born. On September 1, 1939, the 2nd World War begins.

On May 10, 1940 Brussels was bombed, as Michael Spett also recalls. As "predicted," the following day, the Nazi army invaded Belgium through the passage of the Ardennes forest and soon the Belgians would be induced to deport the Jews. The last train left the Belgium for Paris and the Spett family were on it among thousands of fugitives. The challenge now was to get off the train that, in times past, had been considered a salvation. At each stop, the refugees were denied exit. Upon reaching Bordeaux Michael's father, giving up on caution and in a fit of hope taking advantage of his son's Asthma illness, asked him to fake an asthma attack. Hett demanded to see the stationmaster so that his boy could get a doctor. Because the father had Michael faking, this enabled the family to be one of the few to get off that train. It became known afterwards that this train, after all the wandering through Europe, had as its last stop a concentration camp run by the Vichy French from which many finally wound up in the Nazi death camps.



Figure 5. Belgian civilians attempt to flee westward in the face of the German advance, 12 May 1940 (Source:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/German\\_invasion\\_of\\_Belgium\\_\(1940\)#/media/File:British\\_troops\\_and\\_Belgian\\_refugees\\_on\\_the\\_Brussels-Louvain\\_road,\\_12\\_May\\_1940.\\_F4422.jp](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/German_invasion_of_Belgium_(1940)#/media/File:British_troops_and_Belgian_refugees_on_the_Brussels-Louvain_road,_12_May_1940._F4422.jp))

When they arrived in Bordeaux, in the words of Lizzi and Michael, the Spetts felt that they were masters of their own destiny, despite the chaos the city would become, they stayed at a hotel for two days. Later, following advice from family friends whom they already knew, they left Bordeaux, heading for Pessac, a town on the outskirts. They stayed in a rented house for 5 days and later moved to a real farm. Following their journey, they then found a summer cabin in the woods at La Canneau sur Mer, offered to them by a French printer whom Henri Spett had casually met. From there he could commute to Bordeaux daily trying to get a visa out of France while his children could play on the nearby beach, away from Bordeaux's chaos.

Now there was only one more obstacle left. Obtain visas to cross borders to the final destination, the mighty United States of America. Rumors spread that there was a Portuguese consul in Bordeaux issuing visas to stateless persons. It was Aristides de Sousa Mendes who,

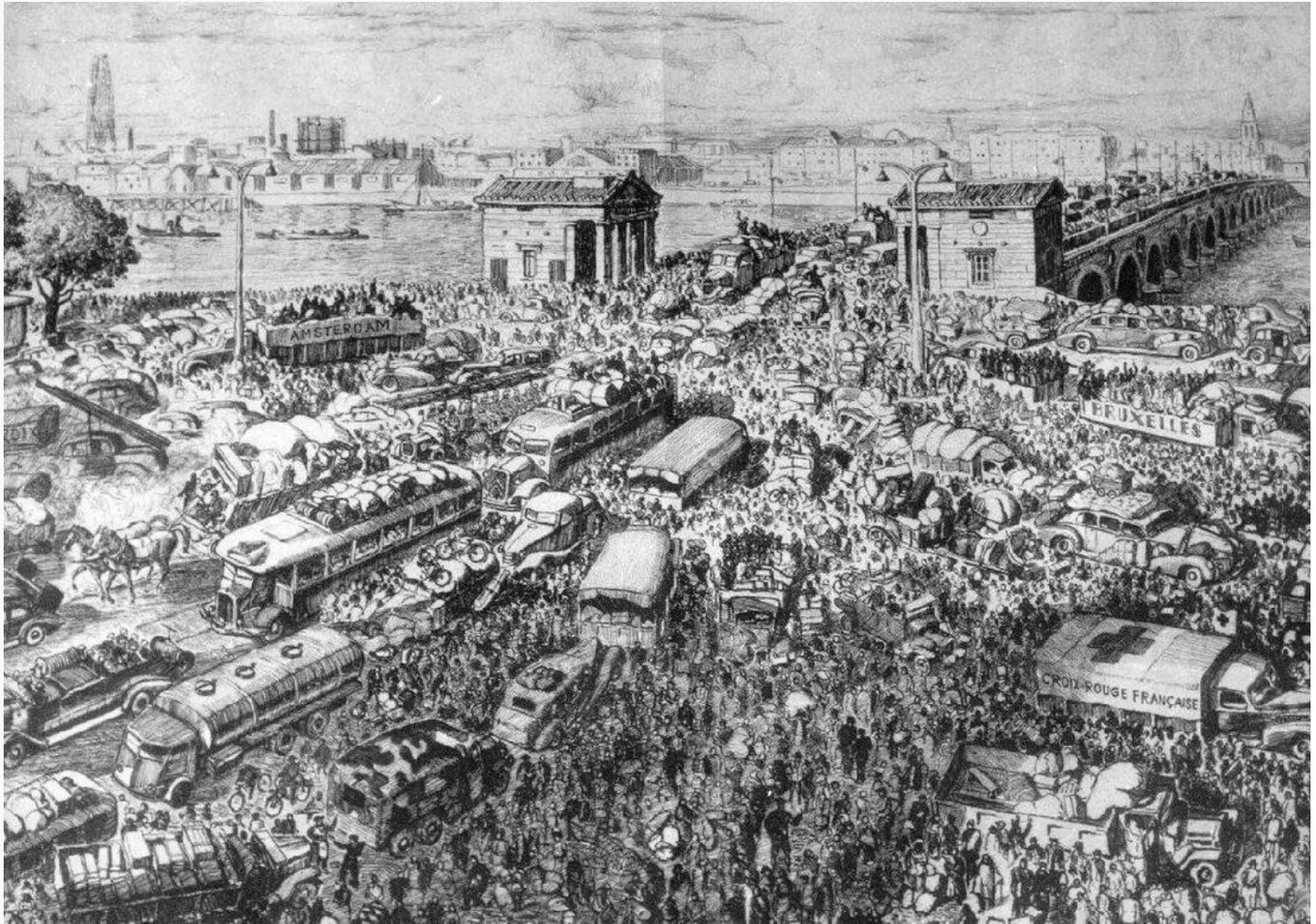
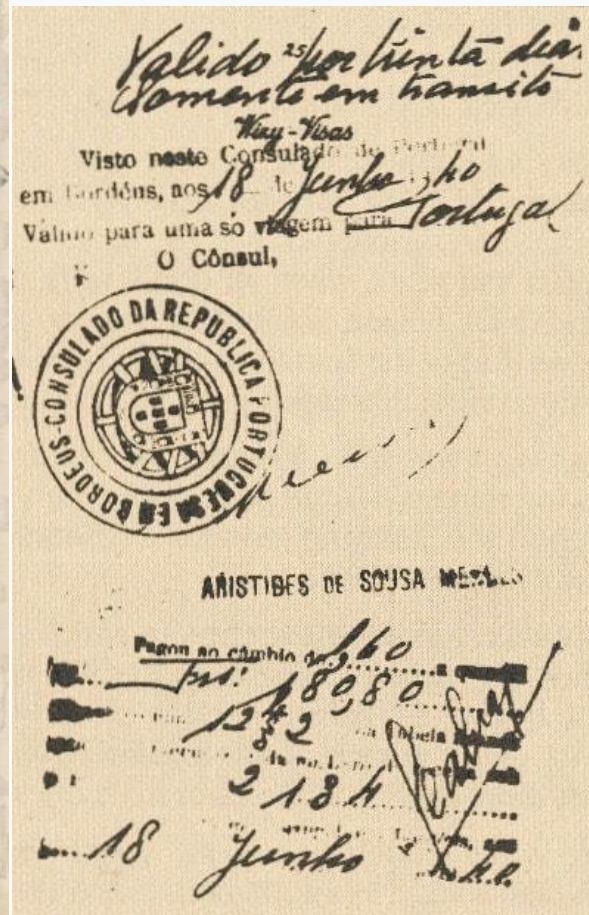


Figure 6. Painting depicting chaos in Bordeaux, June 1940,

(Source: <https://media.sudouest.fr/1933086/1200x-1/so-5ec3c83b66a4bd1a5041150b-ph0.jpg?v=1591707600>)

after resolving his moral dilemma surrounding Circular No. 14 (which denied entry to Portugal) he was determined to disobey the dictator and give an opportunity to all those in need of a visa. As Hitler's army were rapidly advancing south, with this decision the consul saved some 30,000 stateless refugees among them 10,000 Jews. That's how Spett got his Passport stamped and signed on June 18, 1940 by Aristides de Sousa Mendes, with visa number 2134.

2095	Visto em separado	Jola Stanska
2096	- d. -	
2097	- d. -	Leonore Carnu
2098	- d. -	Yvonne Carnu
2099	- d. -	Simone Galinas
2100	- d. -	Genevieve Carnu
2101	- d. -	Jeanne Abraham
2102	- d. -	Cherise Abraham
2103	- d. -	Marie-Paule
2104	- d. -	Eleonore Abraham
2105	- d. -	Jeanne Abraham
2106	- d. -	Gertrude
2107	- d. -	Berta de Guatepe
2108	- d. -	Yvonne Henri
2109	- d. -	Marie-Jeanne
2110	- d. -	Wanda Hysse
2111	- d. -	Berthe Hysse
2112	- d. -	Genevieve
2113	- d. -	Yvonne Hysse
2114	- d. -	Yvonne Sanders
2115	- d. -	Helene Leible
2116	- d. -	David Byron
2117	- d. -	Golda Bachauer
2118	- d. -	Jane Bronsman
2119	- d. -	Mudolf Bronsman
2120	- d. -	Regina Nesters
2121	- d. -	Ida Kenton
2122	- d. -	Caroline Kenton
2123	- d. -	Eugenie Skates
2124	- d. -	Charm Spett
2125	- d. -	Raymond Spett
2126	- d. -	Richard Spett
2127	- d. -	Arnell Spett
2128	- d. -	Genevieve
2129	- d. -	Madame Chrespin
2130	- d. -	Emel Mandelbaum



Figures 7 and 8. List of visas and visa granted to the Spett family by Aristides de Sousa Mendes, June 18, 1940

Source: <http://sousamendesfoundation.org/family/spett>

Henry Spett then went to the office of the Spanish consulate to obtain a transit visa. When he got there, he found an “unexpected” queue outside. Once again, Henry framed a plan that revealed his cunning. Henry told an officer that his passport was inside the building, to which the guard replied that that trick had already been used. Nevertheless, the ruse eventually paid off and Henry entered the building. When the opportunity arrived as the employee in charge of certifying passports was distracted by answering the phone, Michael Spett's father slipped his identification document into the pile of unauthenticated safe-conducts. Upon coming back the employee “found” the passport, stamped it and sent Henry on his way.

On June 24th, the border between France and Spain in Irun was closed, but according to Lizzi Spett, it "miraculously" opened the moment they arrived there, so the Spetts could exit France. Again by train, they crossed Spain, entering Portugal through Vilar Formoso, then headed to Coimbra, Curia, and finally to Porto. On their express to destiny, they were fortunate to draw the attention and become acquainted with Dr. Abel Portal, a distinguished gentleman who helped them, explaining that his father was consul in London. He assisted them in their search for a Porto hotel with better quality beds.

Subsequently, the Spetts moved in with an acquaintance, Flora Ehert, who was contacted following an anxious search for Jewish names in the telephone directory. A friend of Flora, Mr. Augusto Abreu, who ran a travel agency (Agência Abreu) and was an influential man, proved to be a great help in their destiny.

Meeting Leon Levitan, a friend from Belgium who was also staying in Porto and was a long-time employee of Sofina, the global engineering company headquartered in Brussels, was fortunate because it enabled Spett an introduction to that company's Porto branch. Sofina was an important customer, and in the past Henry Spett's firm had done much printing for them. So, upon presenting previous invoices, he received all the back payments for those past due invoices. That income was an indispensable aid in paying for his family's day-to-day living expenses in Portugal.

The Spetts settled in Lisbon at the end of October 1940 and fortunately ended up obtaining a ticket from Lisbon to the United States, provided by the Abreu agency thanks to the aforementioned connections. Initially the reservation had been made for the ship Nea Hellas, whose destination was New York. However, with the conflict reaching Greece, this Greek vessel was prevented from traveling, so what was left was another agonizing wait. However, on November 23, 1940, the Spetts managed to board the ship Nyassa for the United States.

After a week of navigation in the open sea, finally the arrival in New Jersey and a new life takes place on December 4, 1940. Henry Spett, on behalf of all the passengers, took the opportunity to thank the captain and crew for their unforgettable hospitality.

SOCIÉTÉ FINANCIÈRE DE TRANSPORTS  
ET D'ENTREPRISES INDUSTRIELLES

(SOFINA)

SOCIÉTÉ ANONYME

AGENCE DE LISBONNE  
RUA MARQUEZ DA FRONTEIRA, N.º 8

TÉLÉGRAMMES: NAPLIZ

A RAPPELER DANS LA RÉPONSE  
N.º

LISBONNE, LE 23 août 1940

TÉLÉPHONES: (48160  
(48165 X 48169

C E R T I F I C A T

Nous certifions par la présente que Monsieur H.Ch.Spett, administrateur-délégué de l'«Alliance Graphique», 9 rue Zérézo à Bruxelles comptait depuis 1936 parmi les imprimeurs de notre Société.

Il a exécuté à notre entière satisfaction d'importants travaux d'imprimerie et assurait notamment depuis fin 1937 l'impression de notre Bulletin Mensuel. Il a en outre imprimé pour notre compte les éditions allemandes de nos Rapports Annuels (SOFINA et CHADE), les bulletins de propagande de certaines de nos sociétés filiales (Bulletins «Esmas» et Contact», ce dernier en trichromie) le catalogue de la section économique et juridique de notre bibliothèque, un album d'affiches choisies (en polychromie) ainsi que des brochures illustrées, etc....

Monsieur Spett a toujours montré, lors de l'exécution des travaux qui lui avaient été confiés, que ses qualités d'homme de métier étaient alliées à une correction commerciale digne d'éloges.

SOCIÉTÉ FINANCIÈRE DE TRANSPORTS  
ET D'ENTREPRISES INDUSTRIELLES  
(SOFINA)  
Société Anonyme

Par Délégation  
Un Directeur,

Un Administrateur-Directeur



Figure 9. Sofina's certification letter of August 23, 1940 attesting that since 1936 Henry Spett's company Alliance Graphique, provided them with reliable and high quality printing of many kinds, annual reports, and catalogues, enabling him to collect the still open unpaid invoices. (Source: Michael Spett's private archive)



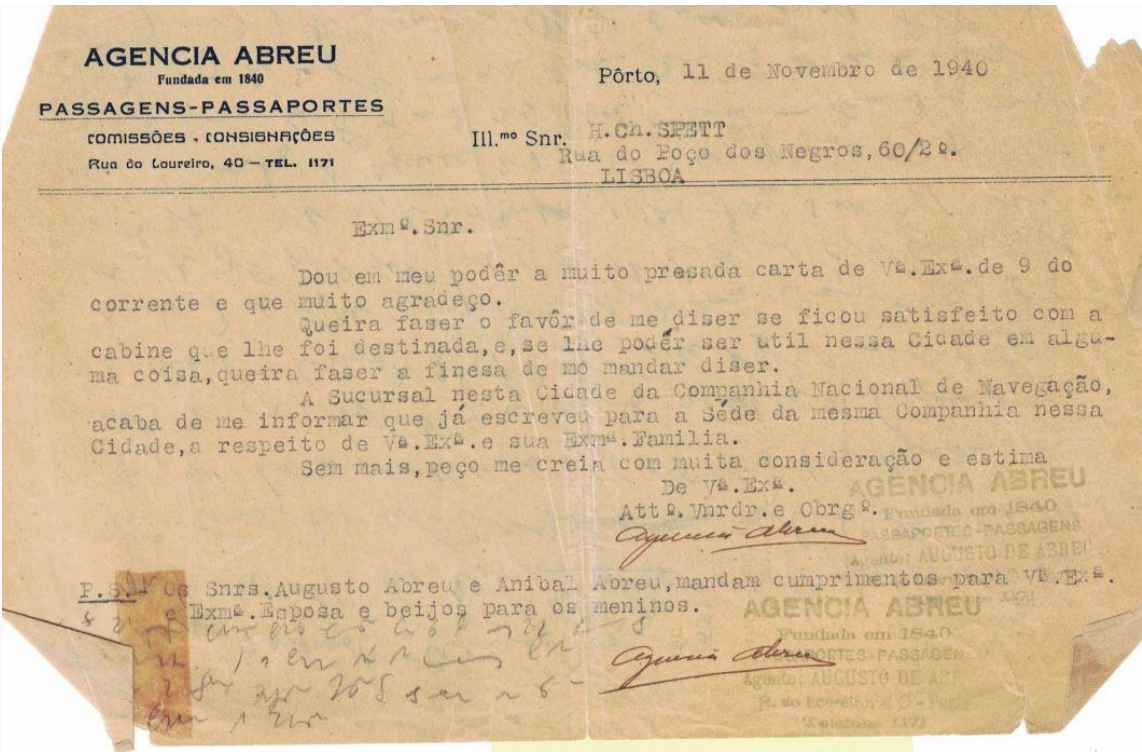


Figure 10. Reply of November 11, 1940 from Agência Abreu to Henry Spett, requesting his satisfaction with the cabin assigned to him for the Nyassa (the reservation for the ship Nea Hellas didn't materialize when Greece entered the war two weeks earlier).

(Source: Michael Spett's private archive)



Figure 11. The ship Nyassa, s/d (Source: <http://sousamendesfoundation.org/ships/nyassa>)

List 5

LIST OR MANIFEST OF ALIEN PASSENGERS FOR THE UNITED STATES

ALL ALIENS arriving at a port of continental United States from a foreign port or a port of the insular possessions of the United States, and all aliens arriving at a port of said insular possessions from a foreign port, a port of continental United States, or a port of the insular possessions of the United States. This (pink) sheet is for the listing of

3<sup>rd</sup> class

S. S. NYASSA Passengers sailing from

LIBRARY 23 NOVEMBER 1940

No. on List	HEAD-TAX STATUS (This column for use of Government officials only)	NAME IN FULL		Age	Sex	Color	Calling or occupation	Able to...			Place of birth	Insular VISA Number (This column for use of Government officials only)	Landed		Last permanent residence		
		Family name	Given name					Yes	No	Yes			No	Country	City or town, State, Province or District	Place	Date
1	EXEMPT	DEBOUR	Alexandre	44	M	M	None	Yes	German	Yes	Poland	Polish	France	Paris	Nov. 10-1940	France	Paris
2	EXEMPT	DEBROS	Marion Wolf	54	F	M	None	Yes	German	Yes	Poland	Polish	France	Paris	Nov. 10-1940	France	Paris
3	EXEMPT	DEBROS	Eure	54	F	M	None	Yes	German	Yes	Poland	Polish	France	Paris	Nov. 10-1940	France	Paris
4	EXEMPT	DEBROS	Ourania	46	F	M	None	Yes	Greek	Yes	Greece	Greek	France	Paris	Nov. 10-1940	France	Paris
5	EXEMPT	DEBROS	Bernard	54	M	M	Lawyer	Yes	English	Yes	France	French	France	Paris	Nov. 10-1940	France	Paris
6	EXEMPT	DEBROS	Alice	44	F	M	None	Yes	French	Yes	France	French	France	Paris	Nov. 10-1940	France	Paris
7	EXEMPT	DEBROS	Rudolf Max	17	M	M	None	Yes	French	Yes	France	French	France	Paris	Nov. 10-1940	France	Paris
8	EXEMPT	DEBROS	Hedwig	41	F	M	None	Yes	French	Yes	France	French	France	Paris	Nov. 10-1940	France	Paris
9	EXEMPT	DEBROS	Jacques	50	M	M	Merchant	Yes	French	Yes	France	French	France	Paris	Nov. 10-1940	France	Paris
10	EXEMPT	DEBROS	Fanny	52	F	M	Journalist	Yes	French	Yes	France	French	France	Paris	Nov. 10-1940	France	Paris
11	EXEMPT	DEBROS	Chais Henri	41	M	M	Printer	Yes	French	Yes	France	French	France	Paris	Nov. 10-1940	France	Paris
12	EXEMPT	DEBROS	Lissl Irma	34	F	M	Housewife	Yes	French	Yes	France	French	France	Paris	Nov. 10-1940	France	Paris
13	UNDER 16	DEBROS	Michael David I	5	M	M	None	No	English	No	England	English	France	Paris	Nov. 10-1940	France	Paris
14	UNDER 16	DEBROS	Gabrille Hope	3	F	M	None	No	English	No	England	English	France	Paris	Nov. 10-1940	France	Paris
15	EXEMPT	DEBROS	William	38	M	M	Actor	Yes	French	Yes	France	French	France	Paris	Nov. 10-1940	France	Paris
16	EXEMPT	DEBROS	Charlotte	36	F	M	None	Yes	French	Yes	France	French	France	Paris	Nov. 10-1940	France	Paris
17	EXEMPT	DEBROS	Irma	39	F	M	None	Yes	Hungarian	Yes	Hungary	Hungarian	France	Paris	Nov. 10-1940	France	Paris
18	UNDER 16	DEBROS	Henri	9	M	M	None	Yes	Hungarian	Yes	Hungary	Hungarian	France	Paris	Nov. 10-1940	France	Paris
19	UNDER 16	DEBROS	Pal	7	M	M	None	Yes	Hungarian	Yes	Hungary	Hungarian	France	Paris	Nov. 10-1940	France	Paris
20	UNDER 16	DEBROS	Tibor L	5	M	M	None	No	English	No	England	English	France	Paris	Nov. 10-1940	France	Paris
21	EXEMPT	DEBROS	Debra Ester Dora	7	F	M	None	Yes	French	Yes	France	French	France	Paris	Nov. 10-1940	France	Paris
22	EXEMPT	DEBROS	Jean	34	M	M	Journalist	Yes	French	Yes	France	French	France	Paris	Nov. 10-1940	France	Paris
23	EXEMPT	DEBROS	Robert	47	M	M	Secretary	Yes	English	Yes	France	French	France	Paris	Nov. 10-1940	France	Paris
24	EXEMPT	DEBROS	Stella	30	F	M	None	Yes	French	Yes	France	French	France	Paris	Nov. 10-1940	France	Paris
25	UNDER 16	DEBROS	Peter	12	M	M	None	Yes	English	Yes	France	French	France	Paris	Nov. 10-1940	France	Paris
26	UNDER 16	DEBROS	Annelise	9	F	M	None	Yes	English	Yes	France	French	France	Paris	Nov. 10-1940	France	Paris
27	EXEMPT	DEBROS	Richard Franz	29	M	M	Electro Engineer	Yes	English	Yes	France	French	France	Paris	Nov. 10-1940	France	Paris
28	EXEMPT	DEBROS	Louis	66	M	M	None	Yes	German	Yes	Germany	German	Germany	Stuttgart	Oct. 10-1940	Germany	Stuttgart
29	EXEMPT	DEBROS	Hedwig	55	F	M	None	Yes	German	Yes	Germany	German	Germany	Stuttgart	Oct. 10-1940	Germany	Stuttgart
30	EXEMPT	DEBROS	Samuel	46	M	M	Physician	Yes	English	Yes	France	French	France	Paris	Nov. 10-1940	France	Paris

Total passengers . . . . .  
U. S. citizens . . . . .  
Aliens . . . . .

\* Permanent residence within the meaning of this manifest shall be actual or intended residence of one year or more. List of names will be found on the back of this sheet.

Figure 12. The list of foreign passengers from the Nyassa voyage of November 23, 1940, which includes the Spetts

(Source: <https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:24L8-WL3>)

A Bord du S/S NYASSA, le 1er décembre 1940

Monsieur

Antoine BARRICOURT  
Commandant du  
S/S "NYASSA"

Monsieur le Commandant,

Les passagers du "Nyassa" et ceux de la troisième classe en particulier, tiennent à exprimer à vous, à vos officiers, et aux membres de votre équipage leur reconnaissance et appréciation pour l'amabilité et la cordialité qu'ils ont rencontrée pendant tout le trajet. Vos efforts pour adoucir autant que possible un voyage pour beaucoup entre nous et pénible nous ont vivement touchés.

L'hospitalité inoubliable dont nous avons joui dans votre beau pays se fait continuer sur votre bateau et nous garderons un souvenir ému de vos efforts.

Croyez, Monsieur le Commandant, à l'expression de nos sentiments de respect et de gratitude.

Au nom des passagers:

H. Spett

Figure 13. Letter of thanks from Henry Spett to Nyassa's captain and crew, December 1, 1940

(Source: Michael Spett's private archive)

*This work was based on the content of an interview (via video call) conducted with Michael Spett on March 16, 2023, on consulting the written testimony of his mother, Lizzi Spett, and other materials sent to us by Michael Spett and on the query the following webgraph:*

<http://sousamendesfoundation.org/family/spett>

<https://www.wiesbaden.de/microsite/stadtlexikon/a-z/spett-henry-c..php>

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