

Chapter Nine

Extraordinary Help

While nascent myth placed Faust at the center of the story of the refugee children's schooling, the cause of opening all of the schools of Oswego to everyone who had their education interrupted by the Holocaust and World War II had many advocates. No less among them was the President's wife and her close friend Eleanor Morgenthau, the wife of the Secretary of the Treasury. Though there would be fewer than a dozen young refugees eligible to resume their college educations, their quest attracted the support of two of the most powerful women in America, if not the world.

Franklin D. Roosevelt and Eleanor Roosevelt had what was a unique relationship between President and First Lady. She expressed openly her frustrations with his policies, generally complaining that they did not go far enough, the President's response to the Holocaust and the crisis caused by displaced persons were two of those issues. However symbolic and ultimately peripheral the plight of 982 refugees might have been to the world-wide crisis they represented, Mrs. Roosevelt and Morgenthau approached the issues associated with the Shelter not as if it were a small government program, but as if the Oswego refugee's plight was integral to the broader issues.

Less than ten days after the refugees' arrival at the Shelter, Smart was summoned to meet the First Lady in Hyde Park. Smart described this Sunday, August 13th visit with Mrs. Roosevelt and her close friend, Mrs. Henry Morgenthau, in a "journal memorandum." Smart wrote: "At Hyde Park yesterday, where I had been invited to luncheon, Mrs. Roosevelt said that she supposed the refugees were to be sheltered at Fort

Ontario until we could arrange to get them outside with friends or relatives, or in private employment. I reminded her that her husband's order provided for them to live here for the duration and she thought that was a pity and hoped events would warrant a modification. She and Mrs. Morgenthau, [*sic*] who asked a great many detailed questions about the refugees, were pleased that there seemed to be the possibility of getting the refugee children into Oswego schools. Mrs. Morgenthau [*sic*] said the program was very close to 'Henry's' heart and she and Mrs. Roosevelt promised to visit us probably after September 5th. They both recognized the wisdom of not coming until after the first of the month because of the Secretary's prohibition against visitors until that time." ¹ What was significant was evidence of the intense interest in the refugees by both Mrs. Roosevelt and Mrs. Morgenthau. Second, Mrs. Roosevelt appeared to also believe that the refugees would reside at the Shelter for only a brief period until they could be dispersed. Third, though Smart was yet to have his first meeting with the Advisory Council, he was sufficiently confident about placing the refugee children in Oswego schools that he informed the First Lady of the likelihood. Lastly, Mrs. Roosevelt and Mrs. Morgenthau would be visiting the Shelter sometime after September 5, 1944.

In Smart's telephone conversation with Marks, acting in Myer's brief absence, Smart described the lengthy meeting. Smart said that both women "were very sympathetic and interested in the Oswego program. There is the possibility that they will visit the Shelter some time after September." ² Why Smart used the term "possibility" is unclear. Did Smart doubt the First Lady's expressed plans, or maybe he didn't want to create unnecessary pressures on himself from WRA headquarters because of Mrs. Roosevelt's probable visitation.

Smart received the official word about Mrs. Roosevelt's visit in a September 6, 1944, "Confidential" letter from Myer. It read: "Mrs. Roosevelt and Mrs. Morgenthau are planning to visit the Shelter on Friday, September 15. They will be in Syracuse the night of the 14th and will expect to be picked up at the Hotel Onondaga at 8:30 a.m. the morning of the 15th and driven to the Shelter. They will be returning to Syracuse the afternoon of the 15th in time to board the train for Poughkeepsie."³ Myer then told Smart that the First Lady's visit should not be made public; however, the press would be granted access to her before she leaves the Shelter. Myer continued: "Mr. Roosevelt does not want any advance publicity concerning the visit and the arrangements are to be kept strictly confidential. It will, however, be all right for you to arrange for an on-the-spot interview with Oswego and other local papers shortly before the ladies depart."⁴ In appointing Smart as Shelter Director Myer had wisely found a government official who had already learned how to function under intense scrutiny. Yet the interest expressed by the President's wife was unparalleled for what was one of a thousand programs operated by the Roosevelt Administration during the Great Depression and eventually World War II. What Smart would discover was that her interest would not be either passing or passive. Her accessibility to the refugees resulted in her becoming an important ally in resolving the one educational issue in which Smart and Ade had not yet experienced success.

The First Lady's six-hour visit to the Shelter was covered extensively on September 20, 1944 in *The Palladium-Times*, Oswego's daily newspaper. The article read: "Although her visit was unheralded in the press, the refugees had been informed of her coming, and had prepared for her arrival. Some 200 were on hand when she arrived

by automobile from Syracuse. This group remained with her as she walked from building to building.” Less than six weeks after arriving in America, these refugees were visited by the President’s wife and Mrs. Morgenthau. The article explained Mrs. Morgenthau’s presence, not that she was one of the First Lady’s closest friends. It continued, “With Mrs. Roosevelt was Mrs. Henry Morgenthau, Jr., wife of the secretary of the treasurer. [sic] Secretary Morgenthau is a member of the War Refugee board [sic] which dictates general refugee policy.”

The article said that Mrs. Roosevelt was in Oswego for a variety of reasons related to the Shelter. It read, “After making her inspection Mrs. Roosevelt said that the shelter was ‘evidently very successful.’ She described the spirit of the refugees as ‘very wonderful.’” Mrs. Roosevelt noted the refugees’ morale when she said, “their evident happiness and good spirits was remarkable.”

Mrs. Roosevelt came to Oswego in the familiar role of loyal critic, that is, one who prodded the President to do more. “She pointed out that the 982 refugees at the post represent only a small number of the many thousands of persons who have undergone suffering in Europe because of the war.” Mrs. Roosevelt balanced praise with criticism. “The refugees at Fort Ontario are just a ‘drop in the bucket of suffering,’ she went on. She expressed the hope that their presence at Oswego will build good will between Americans and people of other nations.” Mrs. Roosevelt then placed the program at the Shelter within a broader historical context while advocating that more be done for these individuals. It continued: “‘Actually,’ she said, ‘what had been done for the refugees at Fort Ontario is to remove them from danger. Otherwise,’ she explained, ‘they are but

marking time, waiting for the day when they can start in carrying on their lives as before the war.” But when she was asked specifically if there were more programs like the one at Fort Ontario planned by her husband’s administration she balked. ““Have you any indication that this program might be expanded at Fort Ontario, or inaugurated elsewhere in the United States?” Mrs. Roosevelt was asked. ‘I do not know anything about that,’ she replied.”

Mrs. Roosevelt was complementary of the Oswego Advisory Committee and the refugees’ elected leadership, the Shelter Advisory Committee. The article noted, “In her statement she had high praise for the Oswego Advisory committee and the Shelter Advisory Committee. The former composed of Oswego citizens and the latter, composed of refugees had done an ‘excellent job.’” During her tour Mrs. Roosevelt attended a reception where she met most of the members of the Advisory Committee. “When she entered the service club Mrs. Roosevelt was greeted by Harry C. Mizen, chairman of the Oswego Advisory committee and he in turn presented her to the members of the committee.” She addressed the Advisory Committee: ““The Oswego committee has a real opportunity,’ she added, ‘and a real obligation to let the rest of the people of the United States know about our guests. We all have an obligation to create good will throughout the nation. Without good will throughout the world, there’s no chance for a lasting peace.’” There was no doubt that the refugees of Fort Ontario had made an impression on Mrs. Roosevelt, and that the impact was mutual. Smart should have felt bolstered to have such a powerful ally in his camp.

Yet for all that transpired that day the one event of the day which impacted most

on the Shelter's educational program almost went unnoticed. The *Palladium-Times* reported the occurrence in this way: "In greeting hundreds of refugees,' she said, 'she had not received a single complaint, which,' she explained, 'was unusual' and spoke well for the success of the shelter. Several persons had placed letters in her hands, but none was of a complaining nature, although one resident asked for additional medical treatment." The documents placed in Mrs. Roosevelt's hands were two letters in the form of petitions. Both petitions had been signed by many refugees. One from two brothers who wished to attend medical school and another from the college-age refugees asking her intervention to enable them to resume their schooling. The refugee students had taken advantage of this unique opportunity to plead their case to the president's wife.

In a September 27th telephone conversation nearly two weeks after Mrs. Roosevelt's visit to Oswego, Smart told Marks what had transpired. Marks' summary read: "Mr. Smart said that when Mrs. Roosevelt and Mrs. Morgenthau were at Oswego they were handed a petition in the form of two written letters concerning the attendance of students at Oswego Teachers College [*sic*] and signed on behalf of the community. Their reaction was one of shock that these people were not attending the college, and Mr. Smart said there was bound to be pressure from them. Mr. Marks said that he had been called by Mr. Abrahamson yesterday who had talked with Miss Laughlin who had the idea that this may have been a policy determined by WRB. He said that he had replied that it was Mr. Myer's decision based on the fact there would be some question if these students attended college while being maintained by the government. Mr. Smart said that Mrs. Morgenthau would probably take it up with her husband, and that both Mrs. Morgenthau and Mrs.

Roosevelt could see no reason why they could not attend college at Oswego.”⁵ The memorandum described a WRA headquarters where officials were scrambling to distance themselves from the potential wrath of the First Lady. Whose idea was it to deny a college education to the refugee youths? They all agreed it was Myer who had made the final decision.

A day before that telephone call WRA staff sought to determine who had made the decision on college education. Marks wrote a colleague at WRA: “Mr. Abrahamson of the War Refugee Board called me about a phone conversation he had with Miss Laughlin, now visiting Oswego, in reference to this matter. When Mrs. Roosevelt was there, she was handed a petition asking if the twelve college students could not attend classes at the Oswego State Teacher’s College. Miss Laughlin apparently thought that Pehle may have had a hand in determining this policy.”⁶ But it was not Pehle’s decision alone, though he clearly supported the decision, it was Myer who had directed Smart to quash the effort. Proof that the final decision on college education did not rest with the WRB alone was that the refugees would attend Oswego State without Pehle’s approval. Pehle was still firm in his opposition to allowing refugees to attend college as late as January 15, 1945, just before the refugee students enrolled at Oswego State. Pehle wrote, “To permit any selected group to leave the Shelter even temporarily would hardly be in harmony with this publicly expressed commitment.”⁷

Once the recriminations had ceased, Smart began preparing for the likely outcome of Mrs. Roosevelt’s and Morgenthau’s intercession. On October 6, 1944 Smart wrote: “When I was last in Washington I left a list with the director of the students who desire to

pursue their education in American colleges. Mr. Rajko Margulies who had five years of medical training in Europe, and his brother Aca Margulies who has had 2 [sic] years medical training have asked that I again call his petition to your attention.”⁸ Myer had yet to be convinced that pressure from Mrs. Roosevelt and Morgenthau would come to bear on him, Smart was still seeking his approval. Smart continued: “They urge an answer because if they are not permitted to go to college, they desire to return to Yugoslavia as quickly as possible. They say that they came to the United States for the sole purpose of attending medical school, and were assured by a Colonel Smith, who received their applications in Rome, that they would be allowed to do so.”⁹ Just in case Myer did not remember the circumstances, Smart reminded him. He concluded, “These were two of the group who presented their cases to Mrs. Roosevelt and Mrs. Morgenthau when the latter were at the Shelter.”¹⁰

The Colonel Smith referred to was a former British military officer, Sir Clifford Heathcote-Smith, “Italian Representative of the Intergovernmental Refugee Committee...”¹¹ Complaints had surfaced that Colonel Smith was so anxious to clear the British-held sections of Italy of non-Italian displaced persons that he made promises not authorized by American officials in order to obtain commitments to emigrate from the refugees. In a related memorandum in March, 1945, Secretary of Interior Harold Ickes went further and blamed Colonel Smith for much of the discontent in the Shelter. Ickes wrote, “Neither should we be held responsible for any representations that may have been made by a British official to these people when they were in southern Italy.”¹²

On October 12th Smart wrote Mrs. Roosevelt saying: “I am glad to tell you that

practically all of the communications which you received from residents of Fort Ontario during your visit requested services we were equipped to provide. I have written each person a letter telling them that you were greatly interested in his problem, and it can be handled their seeing the appropriate person on our staff.”¹³ The petitions given Mrs. Roosevelt that day regarding college education were the most politically sensitive and significant direct communication of her Oswego visit. The lack of specificity in describing what were the issues where progress had been made may have been the product of Myer’s continued resistance to the issue of college education for refugees. It is unlikely that Smart would risk going over the heads of his superiors at WRA by dealing with the First Lady directly unless she had initiated it.

Whether Mrs. Morgenthau was operating in concert with Mrs. Roosevelt or independently was unclear. Nevertheless, Mrs. Morgenthau took the initiative regarding the issue of college education for the refugees. In an October 24th telephone call between Marks and Smart, the summary described what Smart told Marks. It read: “Mr. Smart said that the Margulies boys had received a letter from Mrs. Morgenthau who said she had personally take the matter up with the WRB and hoped they would receive favorable consideration.”¹⁴

Mrs. Morgenthau had sent an undated, hand-written note to Smart stating basically what she had sent to the Margulies brothers. She wrote, “I have been in touch with Mr. Pehle in regard to the possibility of sending the young medical students and a few of the others to college, but to date I have not had an answer.”¹⁵ In a November 7th letter Smart responded to Mrs. Morgenthau’s note. He wrote, “the young people are still

anxiously awaiting word as to the possibility of going to college but we have had no further advice from Washington.”¹⁶

Despite the advocacy of Mrs. Morgenthau there was no movement at WRA headquarters. Myer discussed the issue in his December 4th response to Dr. Stephen Wise, President of the American Jewish Congress, who had written Myer complaining about conditions at the Shelter. Myer wrote: “We have had several requests for persons of college age to continue their higher education in American colleges and universities. Where university training is concerned, as for example in the case of medical schools, there is no way under present policy restrictions for refugee students to be permitted to go outside the environs of Oswego to undertake this type of training.”¹⁷ Was Mrs. Morgenthau acting as the First Lady’s agent? It might have been viewed that Mrs. Morgenthau, as spouse of a WRB member, had sufficient influence over Pehle to be the first to approach Pehle.

Mrs. Roosevelt also contacted Pehle regarding the college students from the Shelter. On November 2nd she wrote him a formal letter on a White House letterhead which read: “When I was at Fort Ontario sometime ago I talked with several of the young people— two of them medical students— who have attended the universities in Europe and who would like to go on with their education in this country. I know that Mrs. Morgenthau has written to you about these students, and I want to say that I too would be interested in seeing them given the chance to complete their college education in this country.”¹⁸ The reference to Mrs. Morgenthau’s letter could be an indication that the women now believed that it was time for Mrs. Roosevelt to step in.

Pehle's November 7th response to Mrs. Roosevelt's letter was polite but non-committal. He wrote, "I have received your letter of November 2, 1944, in which you express your interest in the college students not at the refugee shelter at Fort Ontario who would like to continue their studies in this country."¹⁹ Pehle then tied the issue of college attendance to the refugees' immigration status, something which heretofore had not been done. He continued: "The future status of the residents of the shelter is very much on our minds and we are planning to discuss the matter promptly with representatives of the War Relocation Authority and the Immigration and Naturalization Service. The question of the students to whom you refer will be considered at this meeting."²⁰ Finally, Pehle offered hope, he wrote: "It is our hope that we shall be able to develop a general policy which will give appropriate attention to a number of factors. Included among these are the Administration's public commitments on the matter of the refugees remaining in the shelter, and the avoidance of any interference in a sympathetic public attitude toward refugees, both now and in the post-war period."²¹ Pehle was concerned that if the terms of these refugees' admission were altered after entering the country, this would give Roosevelt's opponents cause to block any further change.

Smart had already exhibited an ability to work behind the scenes when he orchestrated the entry of the Shelter's children into the schools of Oswego. In advocating college for the refugees Smart had the support of many of his colleagues as evidenced by the way in which they responded to Mrs. Roosevelt's interest in the issue. Though there was support among the headquarters staff for Smart's position, Myer was clearly still resisting the idea.

One of the first indications of possible movement appeared in a November 3, 1944 letter from Smart to Swetman. Following discussions about photographs of Mrs. Roosevelt Smart wrote: "Some of our young people in the 20–24 age group have expressed a desire to arrange an exchange of social meetings and discussions with the students at the College. Possibly Miss Betty Burden would like to get acquainted with Mr. Fredi Baum to discuss such plans."²² At first view it appeared to be just a request to allow refugees to interact with students their own age. But in light of the communications between Mrs. Morgenthau and Smart and her commitment to the Margulies brothers, the request for the meeting may have had other motives. Was the meeting planned to interest the college-age refugees in attending Oswego State? All of the requests by college-age refugees had been to attend colleges away from Oswego. In January 1945, Pehle denied the students' request. He wrote, "...granted permission to leave the Shelter to attend colleges and universities at a time when many American citizens are foregoing their education to serve in the armed forces."²³ Pehle was either unaware there was a four-year institution two and one-half miles from the Shelter or he presumed that the refugees' requests were to attend other institutions.

The Margulies brothers had asked permission to attend medical school. When the college-age refugees first began pressing for education, they pointed out that their absence would reduce the burden on the Shelter, implying they would board at some institution of higher education. The refugee students possibly reasoned, as many American students did, that if one did not intend to be a teacher one should not attend a teachers' college.

Time and again the refugees exhibited those characteristics which contributed to

their survival in Europe. Rejected repeatedly by federal officials in their requests to be allowed to attend college, these tenacious young refugees mounted a final offensive. Bolstered by the support of Mrs. Roosevelt and Morgenthau, the prospective students wrote a December 21, 1944 letter to the WRB. They wrote: "We are students, residents of Fort Ontario Refugee Shelter and we are thankful to the American Nation to have given us the hospitality for the duration of the war time in the USA. When we started our trip to America all of us had the impression that the USA would like to help across this example of the European peoples which suffered so much of the war. We have had before our eyes the example of France in the last war which invited the refugees of the allied little Serbia [*sic*] and gave to the Serbian youth every possibility of education at French Universities. This intellectual youth helped very much in the reconstruction of the destroyed land and brought back the french [*sic*] culture, and was the back bone of friendship of Yugoslavia and France." ²⁴

They were aware of the arguments against their being permitted to attend school. To address this concern they placed their argument within a broader, more historical and political context. They continued: "So we thought we would find the same thing here in America, and we were encouraged by the selectors who gave us such much hope that in America we would find support for our justified request. We hope that you will follow the first step by not only giving us the possibility to follow the courses at the Oswego Teacher College but for these [*sic*] who have need only for two or three terms to finish their studies, to permit them to visit corresponding Universities. The question is to get Leave [*sic*] absence for 8 students." ²⁵ The letter signed by the eight prospective college

students was attempting to differentiate between those who had just begun their college educations and the Margulies brothers who had been in medical school prior to their departure from Europe. Essentially some were willing to attend a local teacher training institutions while others were not. In closing they noted that there was not much time left to rescind earlier decisions. They wrote, “We thank you for your kind attention and we would be very glad if your answer will reach so soon, to be able to arrive for the beginning of the school year 1945.”²⁶

On December 26, 1945 Smart wrote Myer again asking for permission and attached the letter written by the college-age refugees to the WRB. Smart wrote: “There is attached a letter to me and a letter to the War Refugee Board signed by eight young residents who desire to continue their University education in America. I previously recommended and again urge that everything possible be done to arrive at a favorable decision on this request in time that preparations can be made for entrance to school at the next term.”²⁷ Smart’s persistence must be noted. As subsequent events would indicate, Smart was not beyond resigning his position in protest against what he perceived as bureaucratic recalcitrance. Therefore, it was significant that Smart, who normally worked behind the scenes, was being so vocal in his dissent on this issue.

Smart apparently always planned that if the refugees were to attend a college it would be at Oswego State. When Ade approached officials in Albany, his meeting regarding higher education was with the official who was in charge of New York’s teachers’ colleges. The “meeting” at Oswego State might have been just a social gathering like the letter stated. It may also have been a sub rosa orientation exercise for

prospective students. The greater likelihood was that the meeting was Smart's effort to persuade the refugee youths of college age to accept a compromise. In a letter to Monte Kandel, the new Chairman of the Coordinating Committee, Smart wrote: "The students desire to obtain as much academic background as the local college can provide, improve their English, become familiar with American educational methods, and thus become better equipped for university work in the event a later opportunity arises for them to go to other schools."²⁸ What Smart likely proposed to the refugees was to attend this teacher training institution as a half-step to resuming their education. They would not be able to pursue their areas of academic interest, but they could return to higher education and obtain basic college courses at an institution specializing in teacher training. It certainly must have been encouraging to know that Mrs. Roosevelt and Morgenthau supported the plan, but for whatever the reason, Smart now seemed confident enough to begin the process of preparing the students for the idea of going to college.

Smart was gaining concessions from the refugees, as evident in their letter to the WRB where they agreed "to follow the courses at the Oswego Teacher College..."²⁹ Smart indicated to Myer that attending the local college did not suffice. Smart wrote to Myer, "Apparently admission to Oswego State Teachers College would not be very beneficial to these particular students who are all interested in specialization or whose studies are already advanced beyond the level of the local college."³⁰ It appeared that by characterizing attendance at Oswego State as being less than satisfactory for the refugee students, Smart had provided Myer an option which was mid-point between Myer's outright refusal and the refugees' desire to attend colleges away from Oswego.

On January 6, 1945 Smart was prepared to go public with his plan. Smart wrote Swetman where he outlined the plan for the refugees' admittance. Smart wrote: "In your absence I discussed with Dr. Miller the possibility of having some of our young people of college age attend State Teachers College. We are now able to permit these students to go to the local college if they voluntarily perform a reasonable amount of work on the Shelter without compensation so that they will pay their way as most American young people do."³¹ The letter explained how the young people would work more to account for the cost of their education. Though there was conflict at the Shelter regarding routine tasks and what was the meaning of such work for "guests," there was no indication that the adult refugees believed that the college-age residents should forego their education to share in the chores.

Smart admitted that forcing the college-age refugees to perform more work was for public opinion. He continued: "As you know we have been fearful of possible adverse public opinion in this matter. Twelve students have indicated their interest in attending Teachers College. None of them have funds for tuition and expenses, and it would be necessary for us to find private philanthropic sources for the money. I believe that the funds can be raised, but our chance will be much better if the total is not large and particularly if you are able to make some concessions as to tuition. This might be done by granting the students a resident rate."³² Always the negotiator, Smart told Swetman he believed he had the money to pay for tuition if the college charged them as if they were residents of New York State. Smart would not have taken this tact if he did not have some indication from Ade that Albany would not block such a concession. Yet Smart was

always cautious not to take for granted any official's approval.

When final approval from Washington was obtained Swetman was on vacation. In light of Swetman's early support for the refugees attending Oswego's schools it was unlikely he would have denied admission to those refugees of college age. In seeking Swetman's personal approval Smart might have been attempting to do was to communicate to him that the refugee students attendance at the college was contingent on their receiving a reduction in tuition.

Myer finally granted the refugee college students permission to attend Oswego State. When and how it happened was not part of the official record. One might assume that the intervention of Mrs. Roosevelt and Morgenthau had a significant impact. Which woman had the greatest impact is unclear. What was evident was that these two influential women intervened, and by the next semester twelve refugee youths from Fort Ontario were attending college.

Nearly as important as Mrs. Roosevelt's and Morgenthau's support was that of the Coordinating Committee. Permission to attend college was one thing, money to pay for tuition was quite another. When the school board allowed the refugee children to attend public schools it was because there were vacancies in the classrooms. Colleges function on an entirely different premise, at least in the public's perception. This was the era of higher education before the G.I. Bill, Stafford Loans and Pell Grants. College education was not a right like high school or elementary school, it was a privilege, a privilege which must be paid for. The permission to attend Oswego State came from Washington, admission was approved by the college's administration, but the money to pay for tuition

came from the Coordinating Committee.

On January 16, 1945 Smart wrote Monte Kandel, who had recently replaced Berger as Executive Director. Smart wrote: "It is recommended that the Co-ordinating Committee underwrite the expense of attendance on the part of approximately twelve prospective college students at Oswego State Teacher's College beginning with the February semester. The expense per student is estimated at \$135.00 made up of tuition \$100.00, fees and incidentals \$20.00, books and supplies \$15.00. In addition there would be the expense of transportation, milk and soup on the same basis as the children attending the practice school."³³ Within a week the Coordinating Committee agreed. Kandel wrote: "Replying to your letter of January 16, I am happy to inform you that the Co-ordinating Committee has approved in principle, the underwriting of the expense of attendance on part of some 12 prospective college students at State Teachers College in Oswego, beginning the February semester."³⁴ As was Smart's style, all had been resolved in behind-the-scenes negotiations. One indication that Smart had been reassured that financial support for college was forthcoming was evident in Kandel's response. Kandel continued: "In view of the fact that one of our agencies has already sponsored our HIGHER EDUCATION PROJECT [author's capitals] and has indicated a willingness to expand its financial participation to include these college students, we should like to convey to this agency an estimate of our financial needs. In this connection, I have been asked to obtain a list of the students who are found eligible to enter college, either as matriculated or non-matriculated students on February 1."³⁵

If the Coordinating Committee paid for either matriculated or non-matriculated

students, what criteria was Smart for determining who could attend college? Were there only twelve among the 982 refugees who had expressed any interest in college? Just before the Spring semester began there was an exchange between Smart and Dr. Otto Lederer, one of the Shelter residents' elected leadership. Smart wrote, "It has been agreed between the Committee and the administration that no persons will be admitted except those of college age who were actually in school, and had uncompleted educations before coming here."³⁶ So that they may deflect negative public opinion, Smart decided to limit college attendance to refugees who had begun higher education before coming to America.

Apparently, Lederer was unwilling to accept this response as Smart's final decision. On February 3, 1945 Smart again outlined for Lederer, this time in greater detail, all the reasons why expanding college admission to all refugees who desired it would be denied. Smart wrote, "I have given careful consideration to the proposal that residents other than bonafide college students be permitted to attend State Teachers Collage as visitors to the classes, and I believe it would not be feasible."³⁷ Smart suggested that some refugees would use college attendance as a means to avoid the chores so many found distasteful. The refugees had complained that as "guests" they should not be required to perform menial chores, while the WRA had promised Congress that the Shelter would be self-sufficient with the help of its' residents labor. Smart continued, "People who are working or are able to work are badly needed in work activities during the day, and a bad community problem would be created if non-workers were permitted to go to school when workers could not."³⁸

Smart told Lederer that there were educational programs within the Shelter that would not conflict with the refugees' daily responsibilities. Smart's response read: "We have educational facilities on the Shelter such as the Trade Schools, and the English Classes which are not being fully utilized, and these plus others which can be added if there is a demand for them, should meet the needs of all our people who are beyond school age. Also, even though there would be adverse criticism if a considerable number of our older residents were to be permitted to attend colleges when such an opportunity is not available to Americans generally in war time."³⁹ Emigration to America may have spawned dreams which might have been unthinkable in Europe; nevertheless, if Smart was to keep the Shelter's critics at bay he would have had to insist that these dreams remain unfulfilled, at least for the time being. Smart concluded: "You may recall that we had great difficulty in obtaining approval for even the college students to go to school, and I am sure that the authorities in Washington would not look with favor upon extending a privilege to residents of non-school age."⁴⁰ With that statement the issue was closed. Twelve refugees resumed the college education which had been interrupted. All other refugees interested in higher education, regardless of age, would have to wait until they left the Shelter.

Few unelected individuals could have wielded such power over government officials as to force a recalcitrant bureaucrat to rescind a directive. Though it was Mrs. Roosevelt and Morgenthau who played the role of hero, it was the persistence and cunning of Smart who facilitated the process. With Smart's labors, Swetman's willingness to help, and the Coordinating Committee's fiscal resources, college was made available to

some of the Shelter's students.

Endnotes

- ¹ Joseph H. Smart, August 14, 1944, journal memorandum, Box 2, The Fort Ontario Emergency Refugee Shelter Collection, The National Archives, Washington, D.C.
- ² Marks August 14, 1944.
- ³ Dillon S. Myer, September 6, 1944, letter to Joseph Smart, September 44 Readers File, Fort Ontario Emergency Refugee Shelter Collection, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Butler Library, Columbia University, New York.
- ⁴ Myer September 6, 1944.
- ⁵ Joseph H. Smart, September 27, 1944b, telephone call memorandum made to Marks, September 44 Readers File, Fort Ontario Emergency Refugee Shelter Collection, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Butler Library, Columbia University, New York.
- ⁶ Edward P. Marks, September 26, 1944, memorandum sent to Mr. Arnold, September 44 Readers File, Fort Ontario Emergency Refugee Shelter Collection, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Butler Library, Columbia University, New York.
- ⁷ John Pehle, January 15, 1945, letter to Myer, Box 12, The Fort Ontario Emergency Refugee Shelter Collection, The National Archives, Washington, D.C.
- ⁸ Joseph H. Smart, October 6, 1944, letter to Dillon S. Myer, Box 12, The Fort Ontario Emergency Refugee Shelter Collection, The National Archives, Washington, D.C.
- ⁹ Smart October 6, 1944.
- ¹⁰ Smart October 6, 1944.
- ¹¹ Stauber August 3, 1944, 2.
- ¹² Harold Ickes, March 12, 1945, memorandum to Dillon Myer, Dr. Bondy's Report file, Fort Ontario Emergency Refugee Shelter Collection, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Butler Library, Columbia University, New York.
- ¹³ Joseph H. Smart, October 14, 1944, letter to Eleanor Roosevelt, Hyde Park, New York.

Eleanor Roosevelt Collection, Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, New York.

¹⁴ Edward P. Marks, October 24, 1944, telephone call memorandum to Joseph Smart, October 44 Readers File, Fort Ontario Emergency Refugee Shelter Collection, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Butler Library, Columbia University, New York.

¹⁵ Eleanor Morgenthau, 1944a, undated note to Joseph Smart, Box 7, The Fort Ontario Emergency Refugee Shelter Collection, The National Archives, Washington, D.C.

¹⁶ Joseph H. Smart, November 7, 1944, letter to Mrs. Henry Morgenthau, Jr., Box 7, The Fort Ontario Emergency Refugee Shelter Collection, The National Archives, Washington, D.C.

¹⁷ Myer December 4, 1944, 2.

¹⁸ Eleanor Roosevelt, 1944, letter to John Pehle, Eleanor Roosevelt Collection, Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, New York.

¹⁹ John Pehle, November 7, 1944, letter to Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt, Eleanor Roosevelt Collection, Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, New York.

²⁰ Pehle November 7, 1944.

²¹ Pehle November 7, 1944.

²² Joseph H. Smart, November 3, 1944, letter to Ralph W. Swetman, Box 7, The Fort Ontario Emergency Refugee Shelter Collection, The National Archives, Washington, D.C.

²³ Pehle 1945.

²⁴ Fort Ontario Students, December 12, 1944, letter from unspecified students addressed to War Refugee Board, Washington, D.C., Box 12, The Fort Ontario Emergency Refugee Shelter Collection, The National Archives, Washington, D.C.

²⁵ Fort Ontario Students 1944.

²⁶ Fort Ontario Students 1944.

²⁷ Joseph H. Smart, December 26, 1944, letter to Dillon S. Myer, The Fort Ontario Emergency Refugee Shelter Collection, The National Archives, Washington, D.C.

²⁸ Joseph H. Smart, January 16, 1945, letter to Monte Kandel, Box 12, The Fort Ontario Emergency Refugee Shelter Collection, The National Archives, Washington, D.C.

²⁹ Fort Ontario Students 1944.

³⁰ Smart December 26, 1944.

³¹ Joseph H. Smart, January 6, 1944, Dr. Ralph D. Swetman, File 3, Safe Haven Collection, Special Collections, Penfield Library, State University of New York at Oswego.

³² Smart January 6, 1944.

³³ Joseph H. Smart, January 16, 1945, letter to Monte Kandel, Box 12, The Fort Ontario Emergency Refugee Shelter Collection, The National Archives, Washington, D.C.

³⁴ Monte Kandel, January 23, 1945, letter to Joseph H. Smart, Box 12, The Fort Ontario Emergency Refugee Shelter Collection, The National Archives, Washington, D.C.

³⁵ Kandel January 23, 1945.

³⁶ Joseph H. Smart, January 24, 1945, memorandum to Dr. Lederer, Box 12, The Fort Ontario Emergency Refugee Shelter Collection, The National Archives, Washington, D.C.

³⁷ Joseph H. Smart, February 3, 1945, memorandum to Dr. Lederer, File 3, Safe Haven Collection, Special Collections, Penfield Library, State University of New York at Oswego.

³⁸ Smart February 3, 1945.

³⁹ Smart February 3, 1945.

⁴⁰ Smart February 3, 1945.