

Carl Laemmle (1867-1939)

"He gave us make-believe monsters... then saved people from a real one"

Laemmle, a German Jew who came to the U.S. in 1884, founded Universal Pictures, which produced and released *Dracula* and other classic horror films of the '20s and '30s. Even before Hitler's rise to power, he predicted a "physical onslaught on many thousands of defenseless Jewish men, women, and children" and dedicated himself to the rescue of German Jews at his own expense. Laemmle wrote hundreds of affidavits of financial support, becoming "America's most important Holocaust rescuer after Varian Fry." When the U.S. government stopped accepting his affidavits (except on behalf of his closest blood relatives), he beseeched Secretary of State Cordell Hull for help. Information about their correspondence appears here.

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CARL LAEMMLE RECEIVED
1051 BENEDICT CANYON DRIVE
BEVERLY HILLS, CALIFORNIA

1938 APR 15 AM 9 49

April 12, 1938.

VISA DIVISION
APR 18 1938
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MAY 3 1938
Department of State

150,089 LAEMMLE, CARL

Dear Secretary Hull:

I read with a great deal of interest your letter of April 2nd to Representative John F. Dockweiler of Los Angeles.

In answer to same, will say that while your Consul General in Stuttgart, Germany, has been very nice, in my opinion he has made it unnecessarily hard in practically each and every instance where I issued an affidavit, for the applicant to receive his visa. It has been a heart-breaking effort on my part to have him pass favorably on my affidavits. A year or two ago, it was much easier than it is now.

The Consul General takes the position that I am past 71 years of age and I might not live much longer. But, on the other hand, claim that if my guarantee is legal, it should be good as far as my heirs are concerned and if it isn't, then my affidavits should be drawn in such form that would make it binding on my heirs. I know that my children are very willing to assume all these obligations.

It is true that I have given a great number of affidavits to people who are related to me; also, to life-long friends and, in a few instances, to strangers. I feel it is the solemn duty of every Jew in America who can afford it, to go the very limit for these poor unfortunates in Germany. My heart goes out to them and I have never in all my life been so sympathetic to any cause as I am to these poor innocent people who are suffering untold agony without having done any wrong whatsoever.

It seems to me, Secretary Hull, that my efforts should be appreciated even by your Consul General because, after all, he is a human being just as you and I and he is so close to the situation on the other side that he must know what is going on and he should cooperate in every possible way and give a man like myself the benefit of the doubt if it is compatible with his position.

I don't have to tell you of my standing in these United States. I'm quite sure you know my record and you can be equally sure that when I sign an affidavit, I mean to live up to every word in the affidavit as expressed by me.

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When you recently sent out your famous telegram to twenty-nine nations to ask them to cooperate as much as humanly possible with the German and Austrian Jewish refugees, I had tears in my eyes. I was overjoyed by this movement on your part. And now to give your humanitarian efforts its greatest effect, you should tell your Consuls abroad to leech over and cooperate in every possible way, always with the idea in mind that the law must be observed. Your consuls can give the law a little more liberal interpretations which I think, under the circumstances, is permissible.

I wouldn't want you to complain in any way to Consul General Honaker in Stuttgart because I admire this gentleman very much and know he is only doing his duty. But I am now 71 years old and am devoting eighty percent of my time to charitable institutions of every nature and it is taking a lot out of me when I have to fight a battle in each and every instance, a battle lasting most of the time at least six months or longer before I achieve final results.

I'm herewith enclosing a copy of my form of affidavit which I have been issuing of late. This, in my opinion, covers everything that you could ask for from a person of my standing, financially. If I have omitted the least little thing, please advise me and I will appreciate it more than I can tell you. It is not possible in each and every instance for me to give the exact address where the immigrant is going to live in New York but I will say that I have a representative in New York - an immigrant himself who has been in America three years now - who calls for all these people when they arrive in New York and takes them off the boat in my name. He then proceeds to find places for them where they can live. I supply the funds. There hasn't been the slightest trouble in that direction and there won't be.

I shall be glad to hear from you at your earliest convenience. Thank you very much.

Sincerely yours,
Carl Laemmle

enclosure

AGAINST THE ODDS

AMERICAN JEWS & THE
RESCUE OF EUROPE'S REFUGEES
1933-1941

CARL LAEMMLE WITH HIS CHILDREN, ROSABELLE AND CARL, JR.

Courtesy of the George Grantham Bain Collection,
Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division,
Washington, D.C.

Universal Pictures founder Carl Laemmle immigrated to the United States in 1884 but maintained close ties with his birthplace of Laupheim, Germany. During the Nazi period, he devoted his time and considerable assets to help family, friends, and strangers from Laupheim and nearby German towns come to the United States.



From an original exhibition developed by the Museum of Jewish Heritage - A Living Memorial to the Holocaust. On view May 21, 2013 - February 15, 2015.