

## **All about the database Bremen Passenger Lists** [www.passengerlists.de](http://www.passengerlists.de)

In June 2020 the US Family Tree Magazine named our DB the best European genealogical DB.

The couple Franciszek and Franciska Szymczak from Poland, 86/87 years old, travelled to NY in April 1925 onboard the ship George Washington

It was no longer in steerage of earlier years but now called 3rd class, it was still the lowest class and cost about \$100/person.

So what might have prompted them to make a trip like this?

The German/Australian von Pein family, consisting of 17 persons aged between 11 and 65, travelled to Buenos Aires on the SIERRA VENTANA in Oct. 1926, and in Feb. 1927, i.e. 4 months later, back to Australia on the CREFELD, certainly not emigrants either.

The ship DERFFLINGER from June 4th 1926 to Philadelphia had 142 passengers from Bavaria on board, among others 1 bandmaster, 40 musicians, 75 waitresses, 6 butchers, 1 confectioner, plus dancers and a Schuhplattler.

Did they go to the Oktoberfest in June or to the National Day on 4 July ?

These and similar incidents were discovered by a group of MAUS members, who called themselves the Aus-Wanderer-Mäuse, the E-Migration-Mice, a word game, while digitising passengerlists archived at the Bremen Chamber of Commerce.

There are about 3,000 lists with 740,000 names, remaining of about 7.5 million emigrants via Bremen/Bremerhaven.

In 1796, the first advertisement of an organised transport of emigrants to Philadelphia appeared in the "Bremer Wöchentliche Nachrichten", translation, "by the swift-sailing American vessel called the Polly"  
End of translation.

In the same year, one of the first American consulates on the European continent (without England) had been established in Bremen.

Until 1782, only British ships had been allowed to carry goods and passengers to the North American colonies.

In the American "Act Regulating Passenger Ships and Vessels" of 2 March 1819, it states among other things ...shall...deliver... a list or manifest of all the passengers...

From January 1820, passenger lists were compiled and collected in Bremen. In 1875 the stock had grown to such an extent that space problems arose in the city archives. Using a lie that Hamburg did the same, the lists were destroyed except for those of the last 3 years. It was not until 1907 that this decision was rescinded and the lists were collected again from 1904 onwards.

From the turmoil of the Second World War, only two collections of original lists remain, the "Bremer Schiffslisten" in the Federal Archives in Koblenz and the Passenger Lists 1920-1939 in the Bremen Chamber of Commerce.

The "Bremer Schiffslisten", a rather misleading term, because they are not lists of ships but of passengers and are part of the lists in the Chamber of Commerce. This package of lists from the years 1907/08 and 1913/14 was made available to the German Institute Abroad in Stuttgart in 1941 for statistical analyses of the German emigrants. 20 students were sent to the Marburg State Archives in 1941, where they had to analyse the lists.

After 4 weeks, 20% of the lists had been evaluated and it was discovered that 80% of the emigrants were Slavs, Hungarians or Jews.

This did not suit the superiors at all. From then on, only Germans or names of German origin were evaluated.

This evaluation resulted in a file of index cards, these and the rest of the lists were the holdings marked "Bremer Schiffslisten" in the Federal Archives in Koblenz, they were transferred to the Bremen State Archives in 2007.

The index cards were filmed by the LDS Church in Utah, the Mormons, and together with BYU, Brigham Young University in Utah they were recorded as an FSI project (Family Search Indexing) and integrated into our database. At BYU, these data are published in the "Emigrant Ancestors Project".

The passenger lists 1920-1939 were part of the Bremen archives that were to be protected from bombing during World War II and were stored in a salt mine in Bernburg / Harz Mountains.

In 1945, the lists were taken to Moscow archives shortly before being transported to Bremen, and were returned to the GDR in 1952 and to the

Bremen Chamber of Commerce in 1987.

The project Bremen Passengerlists began in 1999 and lasted until 2006. The database [www.passagierlisten.de](http://www.passagierlisten.de) was launched on 1 April 2001 shortly before the first publication of the Ellis Island DB, (no April Fool's joke!) with 60 000 names.

It is and remains free of charge and advertising.

Special attention was paid to the places of residence and origin, partly corrected to today's spelling to make later searches easier.

Examples like Pr. Keppsy for Poughkeepsie, NY or Cooldoll, Pa for Coaldale, Pa show how necessary the corrections were.

It was important to us that when a query was made for a name, it was essential that the whole page of the list was displayed so that it could be seen who had travelled with whom or who belonged to whom.

Displaying a scanned page was not only dispensed with because it was still a laborious and expensive procedure at that time, but also because some of the lists were already typewritten. In addition, the Chamber of Commerce offered to send copies of a page, even certified, free of charge.

Since 2002, there has been a picture (copyright) for almost every ship, as well as the ship's vita.

The group photos arose from a chance occurrence.

I had published a group picture in a mailing list. Some time later, an American descendant wrote me that she recognised her uncle in the picture. The idea of using it to bring people together has so far remained the exception that led to the hoped-for success. Nevertheless, the collection of group photos is still growing.

Enquiries such as: "When will passenger lists about Bremerhaven be published?" have reached several times.

The political construction of the federal state of Bremen was given to us by the Americans after the war, not entirely altruistically.

They wanted an "American" port on the North Sea coast. The cities of Bremen and Bremerhaven form the state of Bremen, but the port of Bremerhaven became city Bremen territory, hence the lists are Bremen passenger lists, although almost all ships departed from Bremerhaven.

Four further databases could be added from holdings of the State Archives and the Bremen Chamber of Commerce:

1. Departure data of emigrant ships from 1834 - 1939,  
compiled from account books, newspapers and other sources.
2. Emigration of Bremen citizens from 1552 - 1870  
e.g. emigration to neighbouring German or overseas countries, it led to the loss of Bremen citizenship.
3. Bremen passport register from 1862 - 1936,  
contains passport applications of persons living in Bremen,  
NO applications for passengers in our database!
4. Almost forgotten - found again,  
e.g. reconstructed passenger lists of stranded and sunken ships like the SHENANDOAH 1834 or the JOHANNE near Spiekeroog 1854  
or provisions for emigrant ships 1851  
or contents of medicine chests 1868  
or Gottlob Haering's voyage report from 1853 with the Swiss ship HELVETIA from LeHavre to NY

Two remarkable experiences from the recording period:

### **Albert Einstein and Hans Christian Andersen**

The ship OAKLAND was a combined freighter with 14 first-class cabins, built in 1829 by the Hamburg-Amerika-Linie (HAPAG) mainly for the west coast of North America.

The passage on 10.12.1932 departed from the free port in Bremen-Neustadt not from Bremerhaven.

The list shows 4 passengers, 2 of them Albert and Ilse Einstein from Berlin on their way to Pasadena, Ca.

I was surprised at the date, because in the literature Einstein does not leave Germany until 1933.

It was only on the return journey in 1933 on the ship BELGENLAND from NY to Antwerp, Belgium that Einstein decided not to enter Germany again because of the result of the Reichstag election for Adolf Hitler. So he left Germany as early as 1932, but had no idea that it would be his last voyage out of Germany .

While searching the internet, I found Einstein's diaries, which are published at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and the California Institute of Technology in Pasadena ([www.alberteinstein.info](http://www.alberteinstein.info)).

Translation from the diary dated 10 Dec 1932:

I am reading some very nice Andersen fairy tales.....

Andersen is a true poet. But it lacks a certain greatness of conception which the plain folk-tales and folk-saga have.

Mostly tetchy knickknacks, a bit dusty. The sentimental glorification of poverty also plays an important role, which haunted everywhere in the 19th century. He is, however, a gifted poet. I liked The Chinese Nightingale best so far.

End of translation

In the next sentence he goes on about semivectors in field theory. Fantastic. Worth reading.

### **The bird watchers from Alfeld/Lower Saxony**

251 bird watchers in 111 ship passages, all from Alfeld to NY and all are listed as the last passengers in each case.

This was striking and we were unclear what a bird watcher actually is. An enquiry to a senior citizens' association in Alfeld brought no answer.

More than a year later, an article about the Harzer Roller Canary Museum in St.Andreasberg appeared in a Bremen Sunday newspaper.

Finally the penny dropped.

After contacting the museum, we learned all about the world trade in canaries from the Harz. Up to 200,000 live birds per year were shipped worldwide and had to be carefully looked after during the crossings.

From the 1960s onwards, the import of live animals was banned in many countries, and with it the trade with the Harzer Rollers, the singing canaries ended.

Karl Wesling 2021