

From Saxony to the New World

Emigration in the 19th century

When you travel from Saxony to the US in our time you get your plane ticket from your local travel agent or book it online. You pack your bags, drive to Leipzig International Airport, get on the plane and about 6 to 7 hours later you arrive at JFK Airport in New York City. Once you passed the emigration and passport control you are in the land of unlimited possibilities. Nowadays you are taking this journey for pleasure or business purposes. If you emigrate you most likely call on a relocation company to assist you. About 150 years ago, when our ancestors left from Saxony to the New World the circumstances were completely different:

Paying for the passage

Only a considerably small number of emigrants had sufficient funds to pay for the voyage. Quite often the local governments paid for it, in particular when it was cheaper for the authorities to pay for the passage rather than having to support a whole family through the treasury or poor people's organizations. The poorest had to

"sell" their services to land owners in America. In return for having their passage paid they had to deliver work for little money over an extended period of time. Additionally, the newspapers were filled with ads for auctions of emigrants selling off their complete households.

Permission to emigrate

Once the decision was made to leave everything behind in order to find a better future overseas one had to file for a permit to emigrate with the Sovereign and the High Royal Government. As long as men were not due for military service and the families did not leave any debt behind the emigrants were free to leave against a fee of 5 – 10 % of the value of their possessions. With the discharge certificate in hand the journey could begin.

From Hamburg via Saxony to New York

Hamburg became the major departure port for Saxons with the inauguration of the train system in

The image shows a handwritten passenger list on a grid. The title at the top reads 'List of Passengers of the steam vessel Teutonia'. The list includes columns for names, ages, and other details. Some names are clearly visible, such as 'Hübner, Emilie' and 'Grossen, Friedrich'. The handwriting is in cursive and somewhat faded.

Copy of the original passenger list of the steam vessel Teutonia that sailed on September 22, 1866 from Hamburg to New York arriving in October 1866.

1847. Others would take riverboats on the Elbe River. The poorest would take carriages or even walk the distance of approximately 250 miles. Upon arrival in Hamburg, the travelers were met by representatives of the Office for Emigrant Proof who informed them about possibilities to find quarters in one of the licensed emigrant hostels, buying the cruise tickets, travel arrangements, etc. The waiting time of a few days to a few weeks before the ship's sailing date was spent on preparing the voyage: while the ship provided provisions the steerage passengers had to bring their own supply of pots, mattresses, blankets and anything else they might need during the crossing.

The crossing in steerage

Depending on the type of vessel – sail or steam - a crossing could take anywhere from three weeks to three months. By the mid-19th century, steam vessels with some auxiliary sails were common. While passengers in the first and second cabin category traveled quite luxuriously, passengers in steerage spent the majority of the crossing below deck. They were allowed to spend only 2 hours every two weeks up on the deck – strictly guarded and separated from the cabin class passengers. If a crossing took longer than anticipated, e.g. due to a lack of wind, food and water would be restricted and the danger of epidemics onboard increased. In comparing the passenger departure records with the passenger arrival records one finds that particularly small children and old people often did not survive the crossing.

Arriving in New York

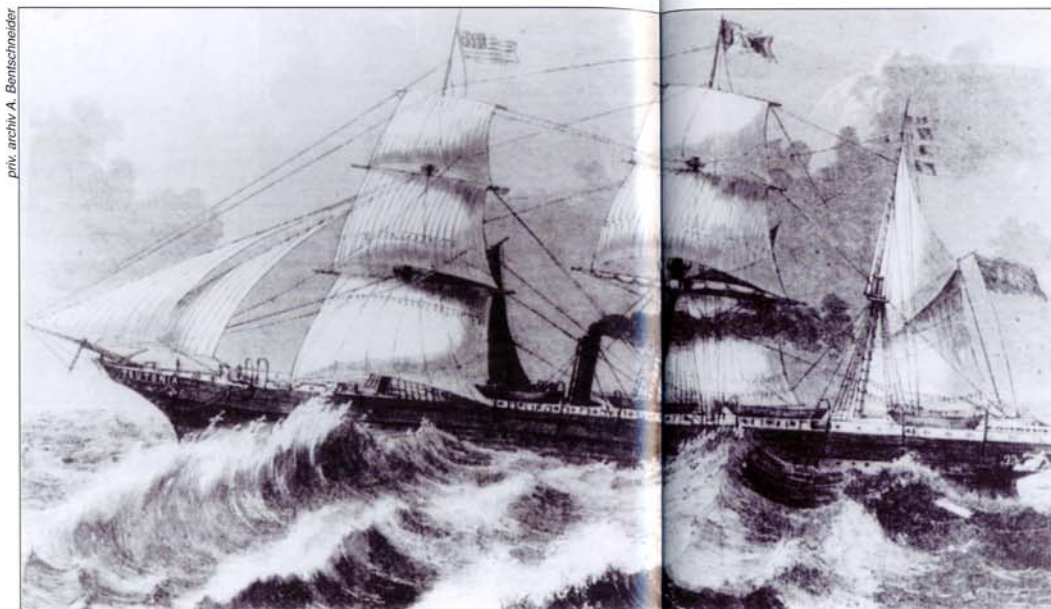
Prior to the opening of Ellis Island in 1892, upon arrival in New York the emigrants had to stay onboard while the ship was sitting in the port until local authorities entered the ships. Depending on the hygienic situation on board and number of persons who had died during the

...
From Saxony
the following
passengers
were on board
of the Teutonia

• 169 •
Hübner, Emilie,
from Dresden,
woman, 58
years, female

• 171 •
Grossen,
Friedrich,
from Chemnitz,
Saxony,
blacksmith,
40 years, male

• 172 •
Grossen, Emilie,
from Chemnitz,
Saxony, his
wife, 30 years,
female
...



priv. archiv A. Benischneider
Steam vessel Teutonia in 1855

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- A few details from the official statistics for the period of 1852 - 1864
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- Only about 9,390 Saxons left for America of which
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- 51 % were 21 - 50 years old
-
- 22 % were under 14 years
-
- 9 % 14 - 21 years old
-
- 25 % left from the cities
-

voyage the authorities decided on the length of quarantine, which could last from a few days to a few weeks. Only then the emigrants were allowed to disembark and continue their journey to their final destination. This, of course, was only the case for the passenger traveling in steerage. First and second cabin passengers were permitted to disembark right upon arrival.

Where did they go?

By the middle of the 19th century there was not one city or village in Saxony from which residents had not left for overseas. In North America, the Saxon emigrants preferred the States New York,

Maryland, Tennessee Illinois, Missouri, Ohio, Indiana and Wisconsin – only a relative small number went to Texas. In South America, the east coast of Brazil was the most frequented destination.

Reasons for Saxon emigration

One cannot even begin to imagine how desperate these people must have been to accept this hardship in order to fulfill their dreams of a better life.

The number of emigrants from Saxony, though, is insignificantly small in comparison to some of the other German States and began rather late. The first

emigrants who left Saxony for America were a group of about 40 – 50 persons in 1834. In 1838-39 750 educated and wealthy Lutherans under the guidance of Pastor Stephan followed them from Dresden. These so called “Stephanists” were dissatisfied with the situation within the Saxon church and wanted to live out their belief and, thus, settled in St. Louis.

By the mid 19th century thousands were determined to leave for America and their reasons were manifold: The weaver and clothier industries declined due to the industrialization of other nations. The shift of production and trade sites initiated through

the launch of the train system caused the mining and iron industries to cave in. Unemployment, an increasing density of population coupled with the crop failure in 1846 followed by a particularly hard winter, lead to an increase in the number of emigrants to America during the years of famine, 1846-47. The Erz Mountain and Voigtland regions were hit the hardest. The failed revolution in 1848 resulted in an even worst economic situation with an increase in taxes and tributes to be paid to the government. This caused the emigration movement to reach its peak in 1852 and 1854. Due to the civil war in America, the number of emigrants from Saxony receded and never really picked up again.

How do you find your emigrant ancestors?

Today Hamburg possesses the largest collection of existing passenger lists of any European ports. The Hamburg passenger lists of emigrants cover the period from January 1850 to August 1st, 1914 (with the exception of January to June 1853) and from 1920 to 1934. They include some 5 million names of passengers from Central and Eastern Europe as well as Russia and Scandinavia. While an even

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- 75 % of all emigrants came from the countryside
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- 29 % were craftsmen
-
- 29 % domestic workers
-
- 17 % farm workers
-
- 3 % merchants or other trades
-
- as well as 22 % were without a trade (e.g. female, children, old people)
-
- Due to the high number of illegal emigrants these numbers are neither accurate nor complete.
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Andrea Bentschneider of Beyond History in her Hamburg office.

higher number of emigrants sailed via Bremen, these lists were unfortunately almost completely destroyed by fire in World War II. The Hamburg passenger lists contain information such as the name, last place and state of residence, trade, age and sex of the emigrant as well as accompanying family members or friends. Once the hometown of an emigrant has been determined through the passenger list other sources such as the emigration permission files, citizenship records, tax lists, military records or copies of newspaper articles become available. These are usually located at the various State and Community Archives. The personal data of an emigrant as well as his or her ancestors can be confirmed through church book records in the local parishes.

Beyond History provides professional genealogical services

in Hamburg including researching ancestors in Germany, transcribing historic documents and arranging trips to the places of the forefathers, both in German and English. We have access to the Hamburg passenger departure lists and conduct research in county and church archives anywhere in Germany, thus, gaining authentic information about your origin and your family's history. While many sources are available over the Internet today, please be aware that these sources are in many cases not reliable. The original documents in the 19th century and earlier were written in the old German handwriting, which is very hard to read and the use of Latin words next to the German language is not uncommon. The majority of sources mentioned in this article are only available at local archives or churches.

Andrea Bentschneider

Saxon Switzerland

Lofty, rugged cliffs characterize the appearance of the Elbe Sandstone Mountains, the "Saxon Switzerland". This popular name was coined in the 17th century by Swiss artists who felt reminded of their home country. The region covers a total of 368 square kilometers and was classified as a natural reserve in 1956. One quarter, 93 square kilometers, was proclaimed a National Park in September 1990.



F. Richter

The Saxon Switzerland National Park is situated 20 km (12 miles) in the southeast of Dresden

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