

# Early German Steamship Companies and Cuban Mail

(Postbeförderung über die frühen Liniendienste Deutscher  
Reedereien im Verkehr mit Kuba)

# Topics to be Covered

- Early ship mail between Cuba and Germany.\*
- Early steamship mail between Cuba and Germany via the United States.\*\*
- Mail carried by German steamship companies traveling between Europe and the United States.
- Mail carried by German steamship companies traveling directly to Cuba.
- Summary of German postmarks used on incoming steamship mail from the West Indies (and some via the United States).
- German Steamship Companies Agents' Markings.
- German Naval ship mail.
- Periods to be treated:
  - Prior to Cuba's entry in the Universal Postal Union (UPU) in May 1877.
  - UPU until the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

# Main German Ports and Currencies



- Bremen
- Bremerhaven
- Hamburg
- Lübeck

## LOCAL CURRENCIES

(amount equivalent to 1 silbergroschen)

Bremen and North Germany = 2.17 Grote

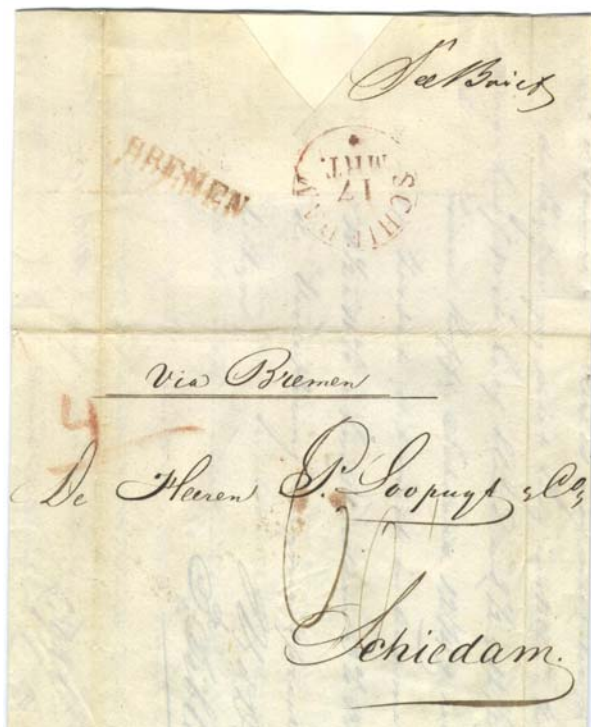
Hamburg and Lübeck = 1.33 schillinge

Hanover = 0.8 gutegroschen

South Germany = 3.5 kreuzer

Austria = 2.85 kreuzer

# Early German Ship Mail from Cuba





# Early Steamship Mail via New York and Bremerhaven



## RATES

24 cents  
(US debit to  
Bremen)  
9 Gute Groschen  
(to Hanover)  
11 Ggr.  
(to Prussia =  
138 Neupfennig)  
163 Npfg.  
(138 + 25 Npfg.  
local fee)

- 1849. Unpaid letter from Havana to Herrnhut (Saxony) privately carried to New York and forwarded on board the *Hermann* (Ocean Steam Navigation Line) to Bremen.

# Prussian Closed Mail



## RATES

28 cents  
(US debit to  
Prussia, 23  
transatlantic + 5  
Cuba-NY)  
5 cents  
(GAPU)  
3/11 sgr.  
(14 sgr. =  
19 Schillinge?)

- 1856. Unpaid single-weight letter from Havana to Friedrichsdor, near Hamburg. Carried by American steamer to New York and by the Collins Line *Atlantic* to Liverpool.

# Prussian Closed Mail



## RATES

13¼ sgr.  
(foreign fee + 2 sgr.  
GAPU transit fee  
= 35 cents)  
28 cents  
(credit to US)  
2 silver reales  
(postage due in  
Cuba)

- 1867. Single-weight letter prepaid all the way from Bremen to Cienfuegos. By Cunard steamer *Cuba* from Queenstown to Boston, and AMSC *Morro Castle* from New York to Havana.



# German Steamship Companies

- ***NordDeutscher Lloyd* or North German Lloyd (NDL or NGL)**
- Founded in 1856 from the merger of four small shipping companies, it started a direct line between Bremen and New York in 1858.
- In 1859 it started calling at Southampton (east and westbound trips) and obtained US mail contract.
- In 1868 it started a direct line to New Orleans via Havana making monthly or fortnightly trips during the winter months (September to April or May) which lasted until the early 1880s.
- It established a route to the eastern West Indies in 1871.
- It had several lines to the Americas well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century.\*

- ***Hamburg Amerikanische Packetfahrt-Actien Gesellschaft* or Hamburg American Packet Company (HAPAG)**
- Founded in 1847, it began using sailing vessels between Hamburg and New York.
- It introduced its first steamer in 1856.
- It established a route to the western Caribbean in 1868 and to the eastern West Indies in January 1871.
- In the 1870s and 1880s it ran six different routes in the West Indies.
- In 1875 it issued its own stamps for correspondence from non-UPU countries.
- It maintained several lines to the Americas during the 20<sup>th</sup> century.\*



# NDL : New York Service

1859. Unpaid double-weight letter from Havana to Paris carried privately to New York where it was forwarded by Goodhue & Co. on board the *Bremen* to Southampton.



## RATES

18 cents  
(US debit to  
France: 9 x 2)  
16 decimes  
(postage due  
In Paris)

# NDL : New York Service



## RATES

9 sgr.  
(Hamburg-Bremen  
+ transatlantic fee =  
20 cents)  
10/5 cents  
(transatlantic/ US-  
Cuba fee)  
4 silver reales  
(double-weight  
Cuban postage due)

- 1860. Prepaid letter from Hamburg to Havana via Bremen and New York. It was carried by the *New York* across the Atlantic and then by American contract steamer to Cuba.

# NDL : New York Service



## RATES

3 cents  
(US debit to  
Bremen)

10 cents  
(postage due  
= 10 grote)

- 1865. Unpaid single-weight letter from Matanzas, privately carried to New York where it was forwarded to Bremen on board the steamer *Bremen*, and charged 10 cents postage due.



# NDL : New York Service



## RATES

3 cents  
(US debit to  
Bremen)  
 $6\frac{3}{4}$  sgr.  
(sea Charge  
in Bremen)  
 $8\frac{3}{4}$  sgr.  
(added fee to  
Hamburg)  
38 US cents  
( $38 + 29 = 43$   
Danish  
skilling specie)

- 1865. Unpaid single-weight letter from Havana to Christiansund, Norway, carried privately to New York where it was forwarded on board the *America* to Bremen. Sent to Hamburg where it was handled by the Danish post office.



# NDL : New York Service

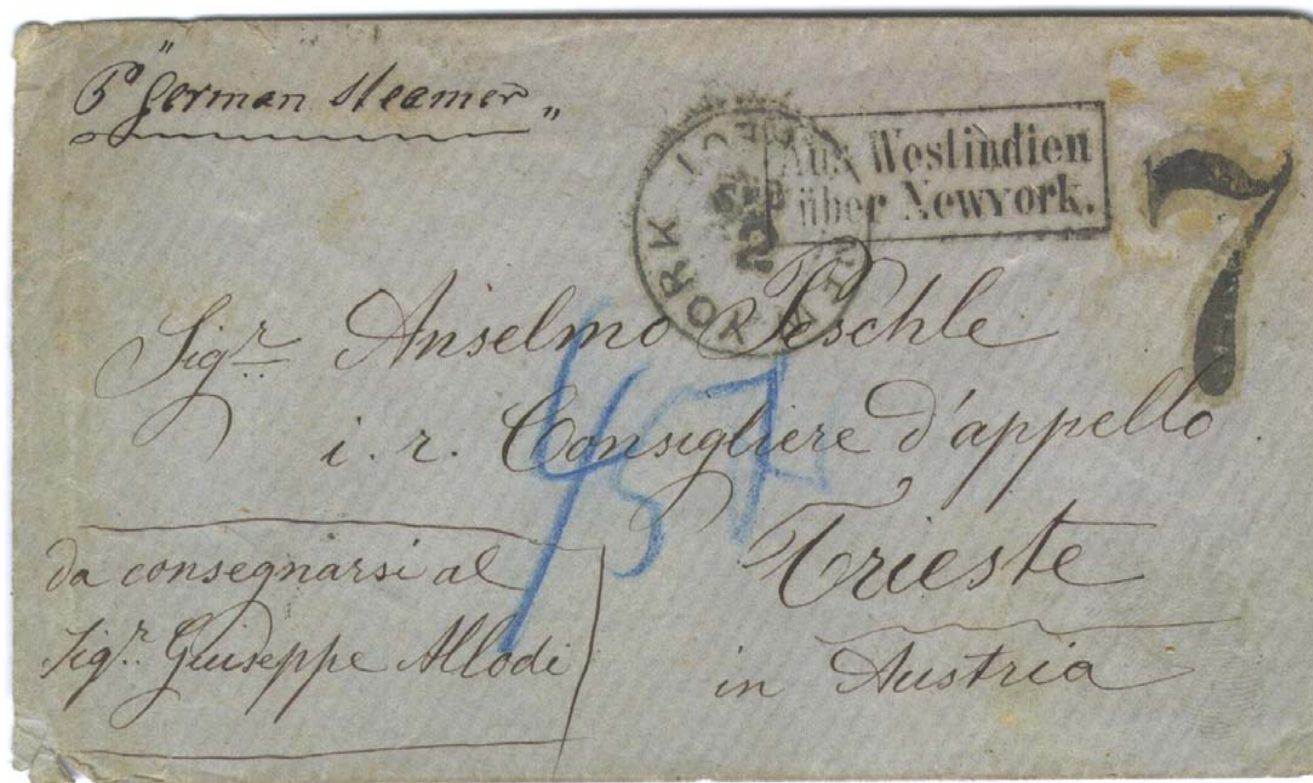


## RATES

3 cents  
(US debit to  
Bremen)  
7½ sgr. (4½ sea  
charge + 3 local  
fee = 25 Rus.  
kopeks)  
1 markka and  
52 penni  
(Finnish cur.  
= 25 + 10  
kopeks)

1867. Unpaid single-weight letter from Havana to Jakobstad, Finland (Russia), carried privately to New York where it was forwarded on board the *Union* to Bremen. Transit through St. Petersburg.

# NDL : New York Service



## RATES

7 cents  
(US debit to  
Bremen, transit  
from Cuba)

45 kreuzers  
(7 Cuba-US +10  
US-NGU + 5  
unpaid fine = 22  
cents to Austria)

- 1869. Unpaid single-weight letter from Havana to Trieste, Austria, carried by American steamer to New York where it was forwarded on board the *Deutschland* to Bremen. Earliest use.

# NDL : New York Service



## RATES

9 sgr.  
(internal + transatlantic  
+ US-Cuba fee)

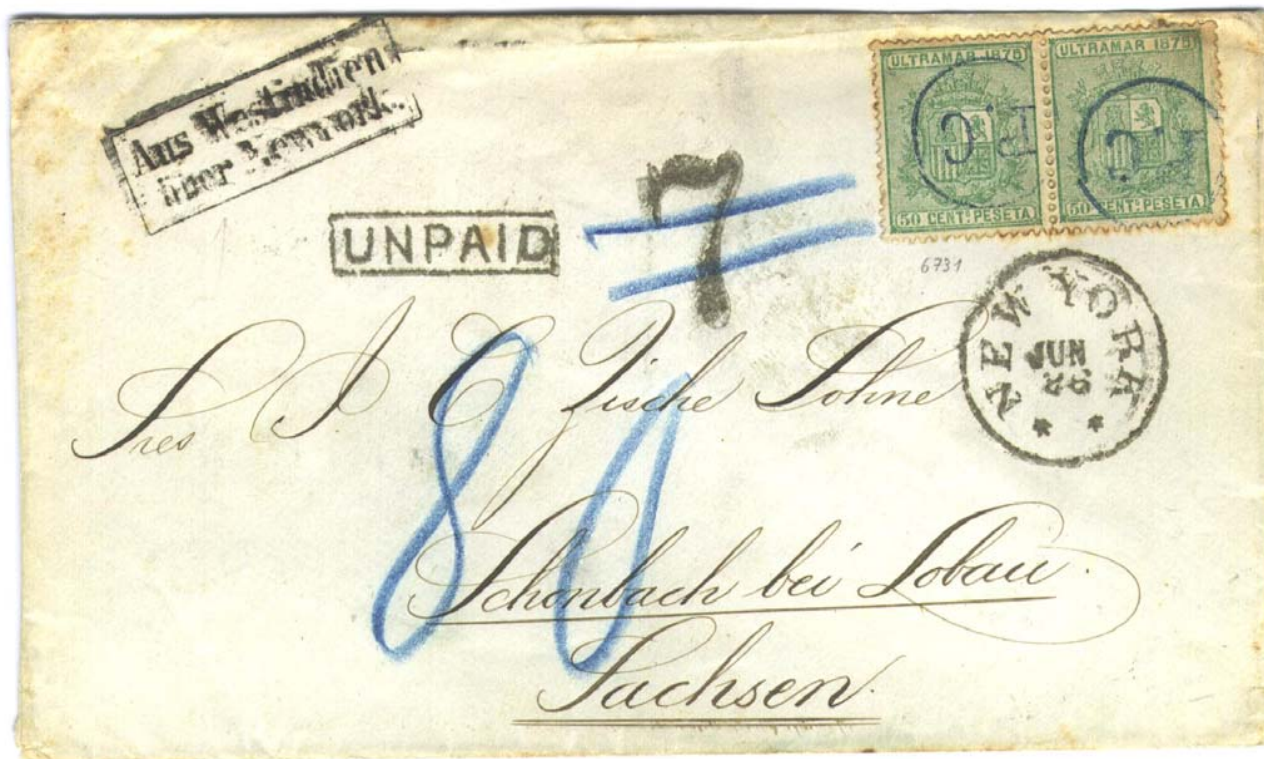
3 cents  
(credit to US in error  
– it should have been  
7 cents)

2 silver reales  
(Cuban postage due)

- 1870. Prepaid single-weight letter from Bremen to Havana carried to New York on board the *Deutschland*. Sent by American steamer to Havana.



# NDL : New York Service



## RATES

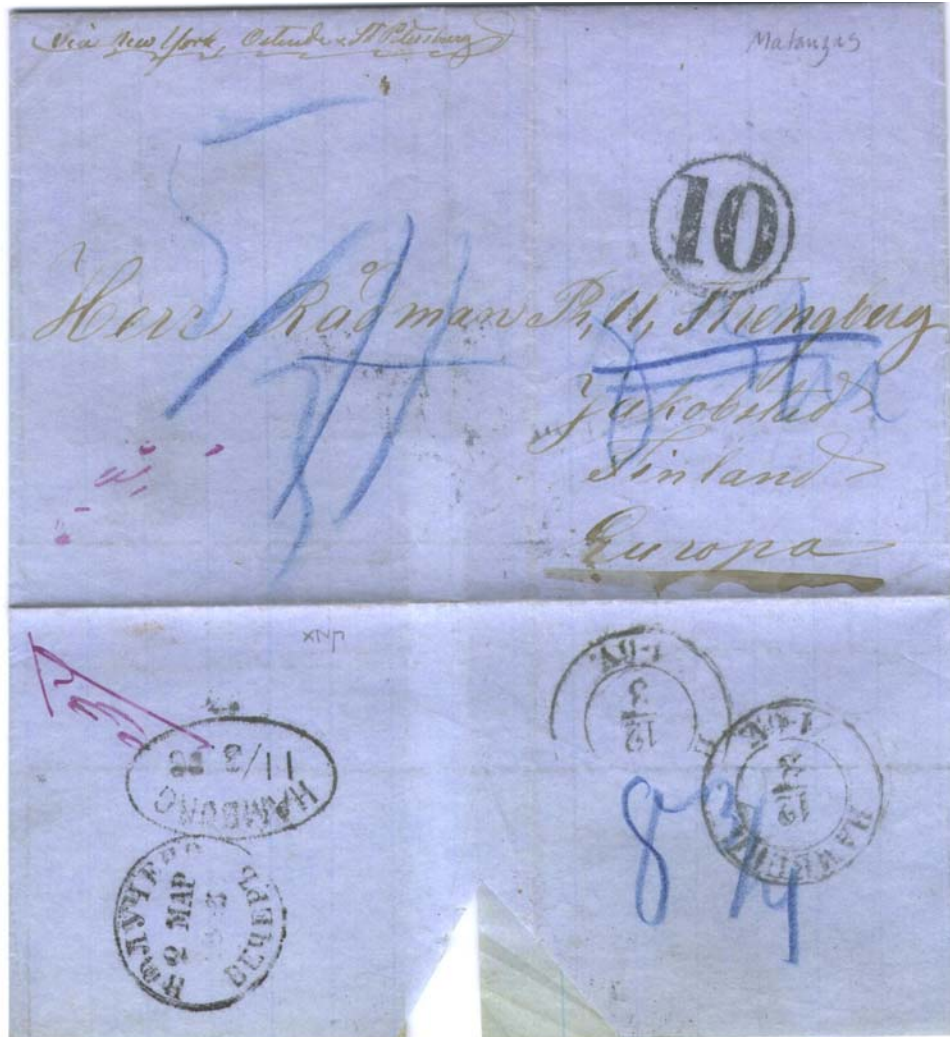
1 peso  
(Cuban PO or steam  
-ship fee?, not valid  
in the US pre UPU)  
7 cents  
(US debit to Hamburg  
- crossed out)  
80 pfennige  
(7 Cuba-US + 6 US-  
Germany + 6 unpaid  
fine = 19 cents)

- 1875. Unpaid letter from Havana to Saxony, Germany, carried by American steamer to New York where it was forwarded on board the *Rhein* to Bremen. Double-weight in Cuba (> ¼ ounce), single-weight UPU (> ½ ounce)? Latest use.



# HAPAG : New York Service

1863. Unpaid  
single-weight  
letter from  
Matanzas to  
Jakobstad,  
Finland  
(Russia),  
carried by the  
*Eagle* to New  
York where it  
was forwarded  
on board the  
*Bavaria* to  
Hamburg.  
Transit through  
St. Petersburg.



## RATES

10 cents  
(US debit to Hamburg  
= 5 + 5 convention)  
8¾ sgr.  
(2¼ Cuba-NY + 4½  
sea charge + 2  
GAPU to Russia –  
crossed out)  
11 sgr.  
(wrong rate for  
Scandinavia – crossed  
out)  
8 sgr. (5/3)  
8¾ sgr. – (re-written,  
which = 27 kopeks)  
37 kopecks  
27 + 10 inland fee)

# HAPAG : New York Service



## RATES

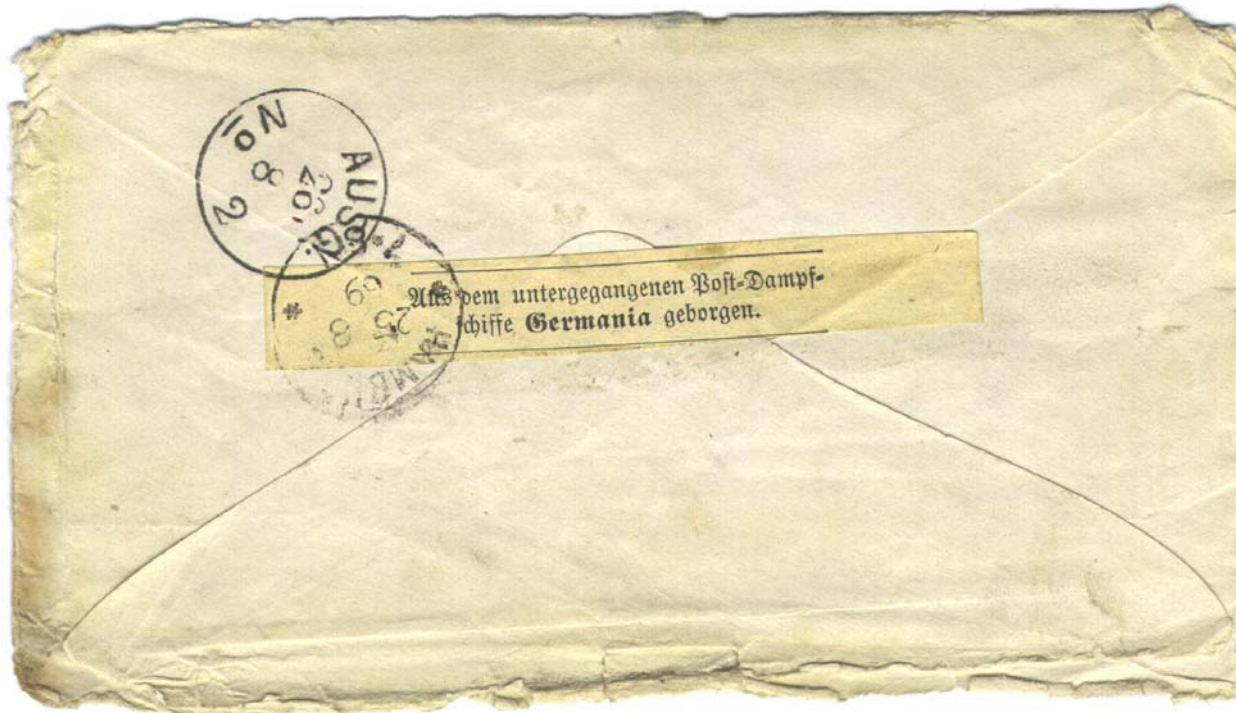
7 groschen  
= 17 cents  
(7 cents Cuba -  
NY + 10 cents  
to Hamburg )

9 groschen  
(7 + 2 Hamburg  
- Bonn)

- 1869. Unpaid single-weight letter from Havana to Bonn, carried by the steamer *Bienville* to New York where it was forwarded on board the *Germania* which was wrecked on 7 August near Cape Race, Newfoundland. Mails were salvaged and carried by the *Cimbria* (HAPAG).



# HAPAG : New York Service



- There were no casualties.
- 80 sacks of mail, some very wet, were sent by special train to London.
- The label reads “Recovered from the sunken mail Steamship **Germania**.”



# HAPAG : New York Service



## RATE

5 cents  
(prepaid to  
Germany –  
UPU rates)



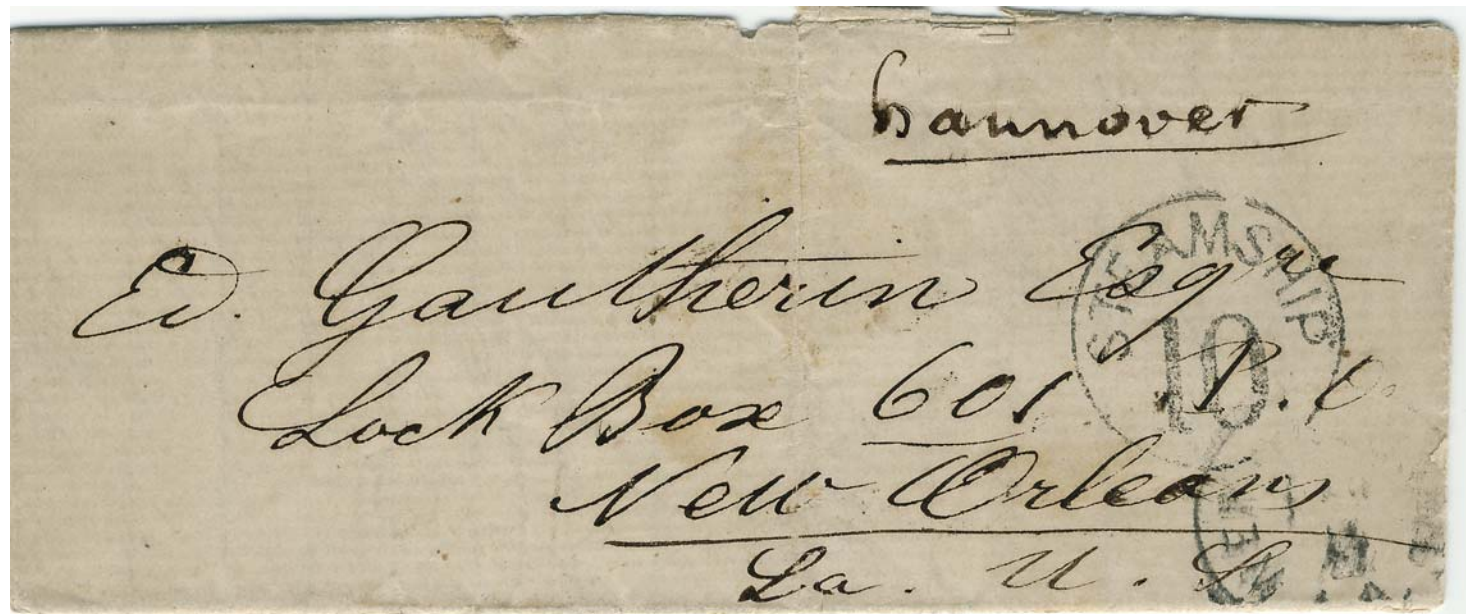
- 1876. Single-weight letter from Havana to Germany, taken privately to NY where it was forwarded by Frederick Probst & Co. who sent it prepaid on board the *Hammonia* via Southampton, England.



# NordDeustcher Lloyd: West Indies Service

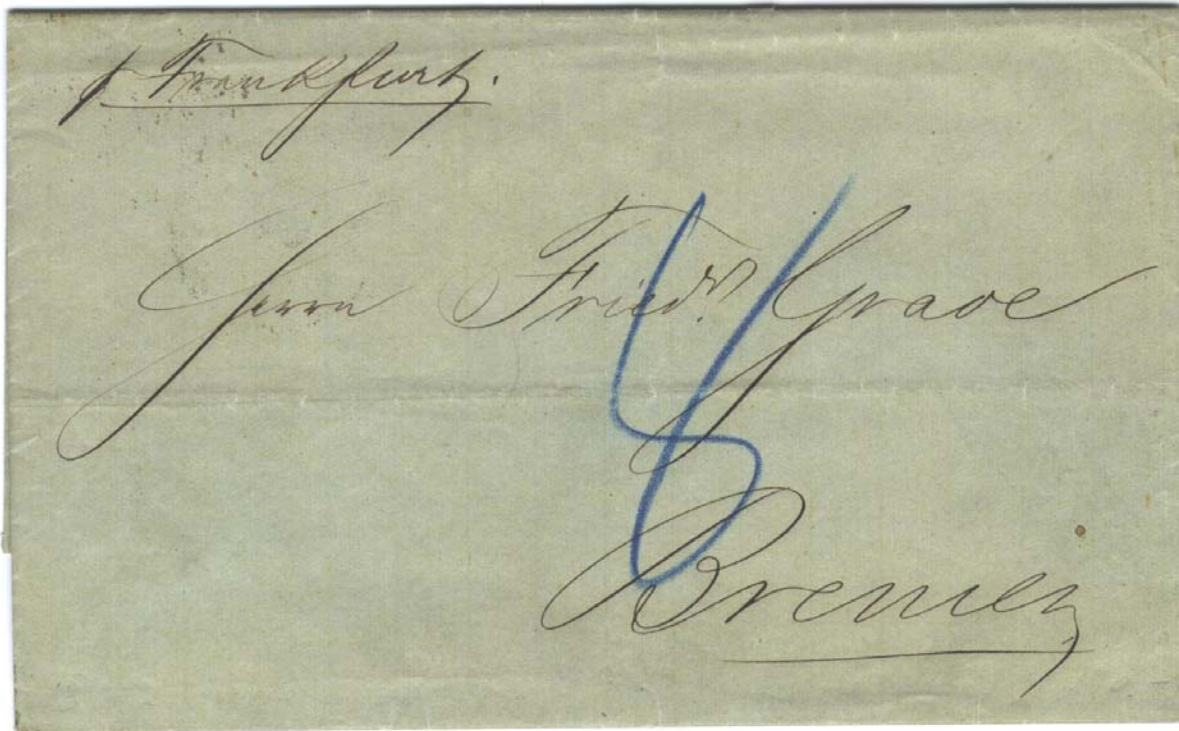
- **Western Caribbean (Bremen – New Orleans Line)**
- Operated monthly or fortnightly trips, between September and April or May, from 1868 to the mid-1880s.
- The line made stops in Southampton and France.
- H. Uppmann was the agent in Havana.
- Robert G. Stone recorded only two covers from this line.
- Three or four different steamers were used per season.
- Rarely a rectangular marking was used in Bremen for this mail.
- **Eastern Caribbean (Bremen – St. Thomas Line)**
- This service started in April 1871, calling at several islands, Central and South America, ceasing its operations in 1874.
- The British GPO contracted it to carry mail to St. Thomas from July 1871 to March 1874.
- F. de Aldecoa was the agent in St. Thomas.
- Rarely a rectangular marking was used for the mail taken to Bremen and a circular one for correspondence dropped off at Cherbourg.

# NDL : Bremen – New Orleans Line



- 1869. Unpaid single-weight letter from Havana to New Orleans carried by the *Hannover*, charged 10 cents postage due. (Geoffrey Lewis collection)

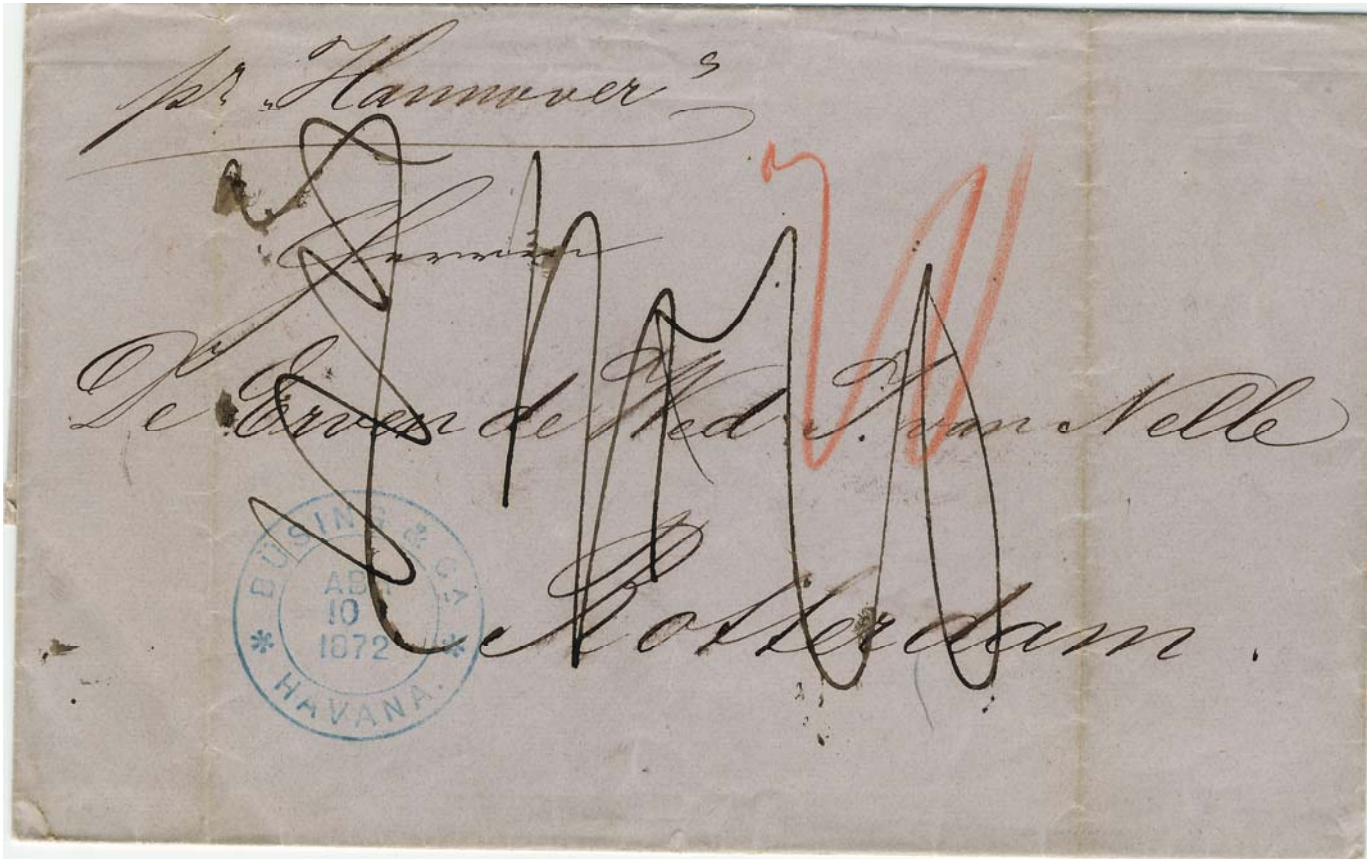
# NDL : Bremen – New Orleans Line



<p><u>RATE</u> 8 silbergroschen (postage due)</p>
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- 1870. Unpaid single-weight letter from Havana to Bremen carried by the *Frankfurt*.

# NDL : Bremen – New Orleans Line



## RATES

7 pence  
(crossed out)

1/1  
(one shilling,  
one penny)

70 cents  
(Dutch)

- 1872. Unpaid single-weight letter from Havana to Rotterdam, the Netherlands, carried by the *Hannover* via Southampton and London. (Geoffrey Lewis collection)



# NDL : Bremen – New Orleans Line



- 1873. Unpaid double-weight letter from Havana to Paris carried by the *Frankfurt* to Southampton. It received the Franco-British accountancy mark 1F60C and was charged 24 *decimes* postage due.

# NDL : Bremen - St. Thomas Line



## RATES

5 silbergroschen  
(Bremen debit to  
France)  
12 decimes  
(single-weight due)



- 1872. Unpaid single-weight letter from Havana to Paris via St. Thomas and Bremen. Carried by the *Frankfurt to Bremen*.

# HAPAG: West Indies Service

- **Western Caribbean (Hamburg – Havana Line)**
  - It started operating in 1868 until 1874, but not during May to Sept.
  - In 1879 it opened a branch connecting St. Thomas, Havana and Mexico.
  - Barkhausen & Remmer were the agents in Havana.
  - In 1901 it resumed direct service from Hamburg and started a line from New York (Atlas Service).
  - This service was interrupted by WWI.
  - One example of a two-line marking has been recorded on this correspondence.
- **Eastern Caribbean (Hamburg – St. Thomas Line)**
  - This service started in 1871, calling at some of the same port as the NDL, ceasing its operations in 1914.
  - Schon, Willink & Co. were the agents in St. Thomas.
  - A circular marking was used for the mail dropped off at Cherbourg.
  - It introduced its own private postage stamps in 1874, which were in use until 1881 (about 80-90 covers known), only in pre-UPU countries.



# HAPAG : Hamburg – Havana Line



## RATES

50 c. de peseta  
(probably no postal  
value?)

70 cents  
(postage due in  
Denmark?)

- 1872. Single-weight letter from Havana to Copenhagen carried by the *Vandalia* to Hamburg. Taken directly to the ship or agent.

# HAPAG : St. Thomas – Havana Branch Line



- 1879. Prepaid double-weight letter from Baltimore to St. Thomas carried by the *Colorado*. It was redirected and forwarded by Feddersen, Willink & Co. to Havana, prepaid with a 10 cent HAPAG stamp.

# HAPAG : Hamburg – Havana Line



- 1893. Two-cent postal card from Manzanillo to Hamburg. Carried by the *Frankfurt to Southampton*





## Summary of German Incoming Steamship Mail Markings Found on Caribbean Mail

Aus Westindien  
über Newyork.

- (1869-77) 12 covers recorded, all from Cuba via NY to Europe. NGU P.O. and later German Empire P.O. in Bremen. (37 x 13 mm)

Aus Westindien  
über Bremen

- (1872-73, 1880) 8 covers recorded. Bremen P.O. for NGL mail. (38 x 14 mm)

*Aus Westindien  
via Hamburg*

- (1872) 1 cover recorded. Hamburg P.O. for HAPAG mail. Also one matching “Aus Südamerika / via Hamburg” recorded in 1873. (44 x 15 mm)



- (1872-73) 5 covers recorded. Railway Post Office 10 between Verviers, Belgium, and Cologne.
- (1874-1913) many examples recorded. (27 mm in diameter – each)

# HAPAG: Agents' markings



- Ringström and Tester describe four different styles of HAPAG agents' markings used in the West Indies.
- At least 17 different type "a" handstamps have been recorded (style shown on left).
- There is a example of the type "a" used by the Havana agents Barkhausen & Remmer, on a postcard from the 1880s.
- There is another style of agent marking used in Havana not previously recorded.

# HAPAG: Agents' markings

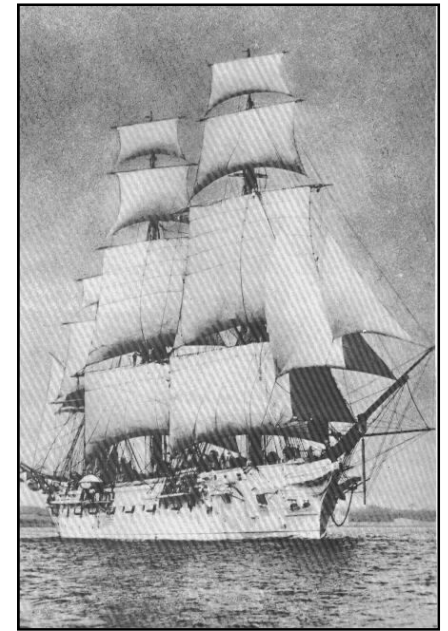
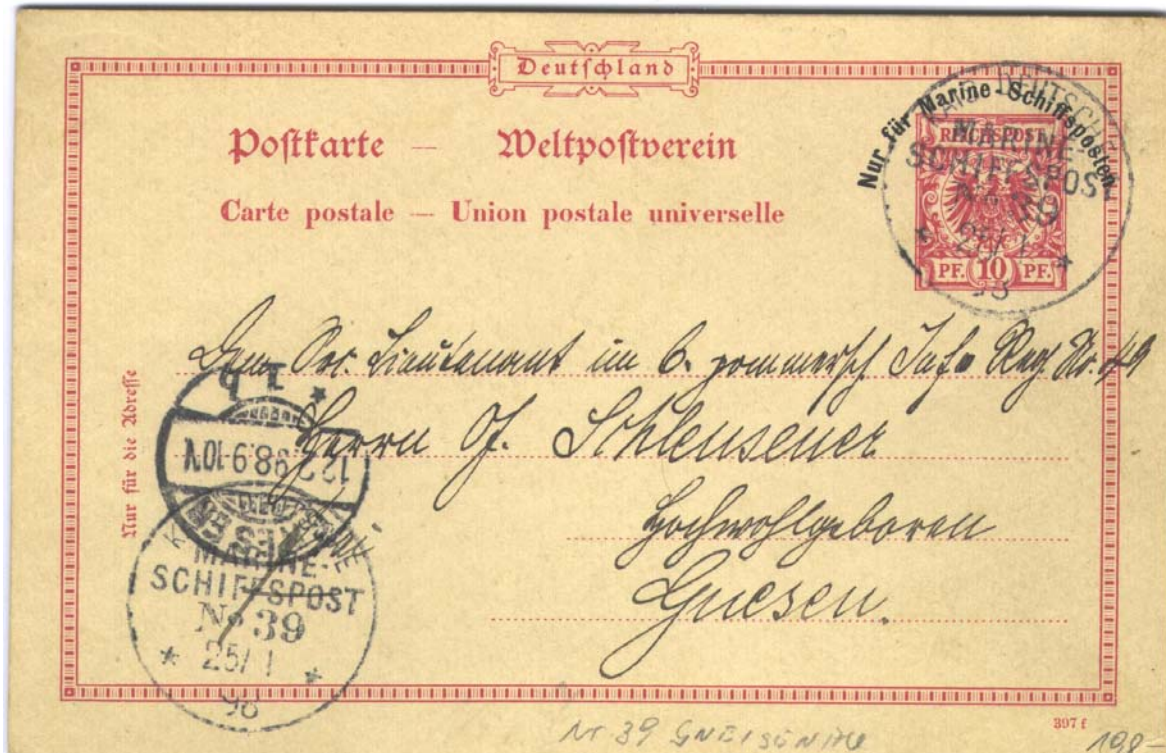


1893. Havana to Port au Prince, Haiti, via San Juan, Puerto Rico. Sent privately by Martin Falk, the HAPAG agent in Havana, to San Juan where it was forwarded and sent on board a steamer of the Ramon Herrera company. This style of circular agent's marking has not been previously described.





# German Naval Ship Mail



S.M.S. Gneisenau (1879-1900)

- 24 January 1898. German Navy sailor's 10-pfenning postal card sent from Havana to Gnesen, Germany, during the brief visit of the warship *Gneisenau* to the Cuban capital. The ship's post office designation was No. 39.



## Acknowledgements and Sources

- **Georg Mehrtens (to whom this presentation is dedicated), Geoffrey Lewis, and Richard Winter.**
- Dreschel, E. *1886-1986 A Century of German Ship Posts.*
- Lewis, G. & Kouri, Y.H., Jr. "Cuban Mail and the 'NordDeutscher Lloyd Steamship Company,'" *TCP*, No. 32, 1999.
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- Stone, Robert G. *A Caribbean Neptune ...* 1993.
- Van der Linden, J. *Catalogue des Marques de Passage.* Soluphil, 1993.