

1886-1986

A CENTURY OF
GERMAN SHIP POSTS

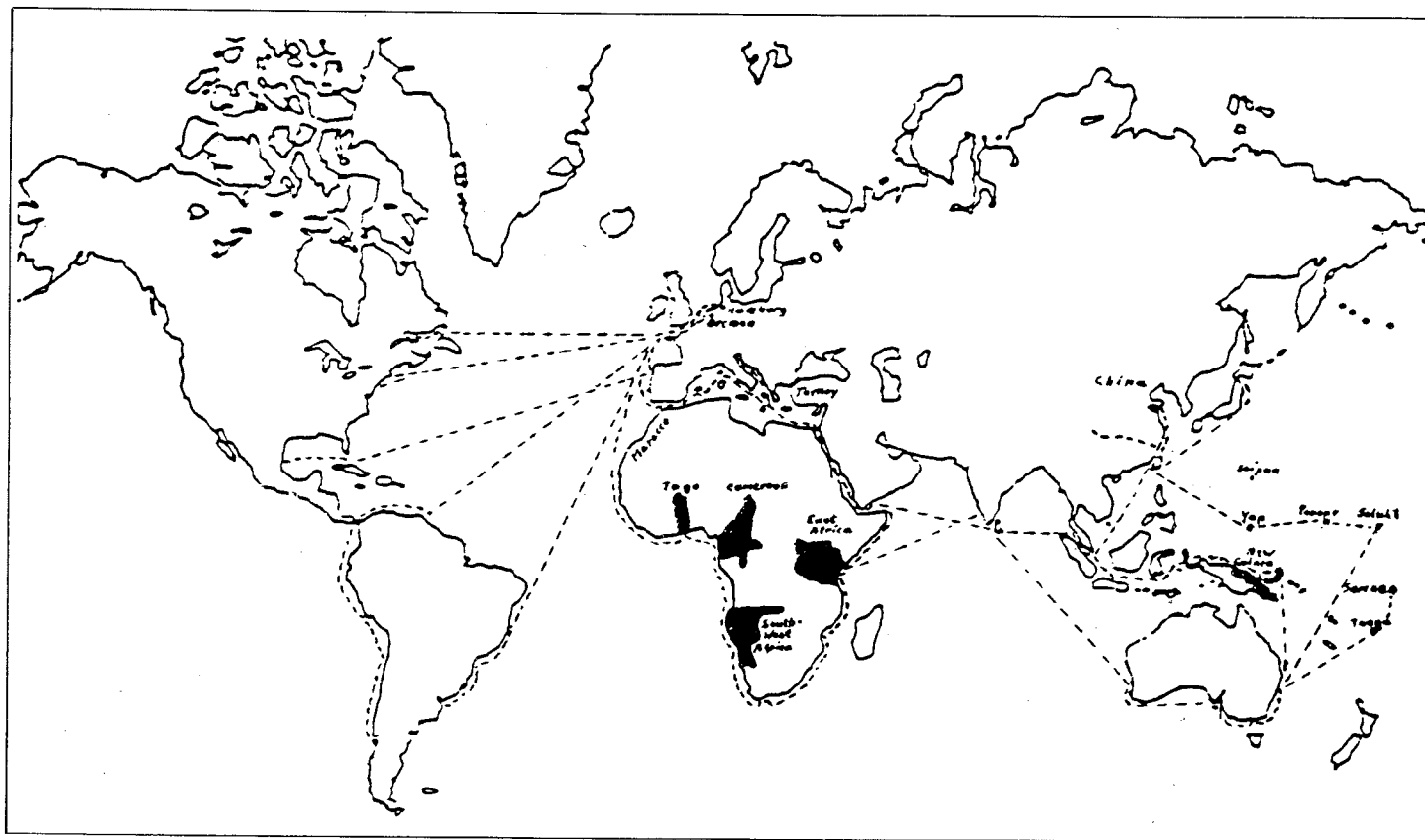


By
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The early German Sea Posts: to the Far East, Australia, the Pacific Ocean colonies, to East, West and around Africa, to the U.S. East Coast, and to South America, were so helpful to German trade, travellers and prestige, that in 1914 twenty overseas routes operated, plus seven occasional cruise cancels. The first routes are shown. And the colonies. Like other powers, Germany also had Offices in Morocco, Turkey and China.

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GERMANY'S LEADING ROLE IN SHIPBOARD POSTAL SERVICES

We live in an age when air travel to the ends of the earth is possible within a day or two. Passenger shipping, which tried to make a comeback after WW II, could not compete in the old pattern of regular liner routes with the coming of the jets from 1958 on. Cruising, even building of new ships, again gives people a chance to be at sea. But it is to have fun, relax, live it up, not mainly to get somewhere. In the "old days" there was a destination at the end of the voyage, a purpose to being on the ship.

Shipowners and postal authorities responded by providing travelling postal service, TPOs at sea rather than on land. The same Dr. Heinrich von Stephan who was co-founder of the UPU in 1874, in 1886 helped bring into existence SEA POST OFFICES, the subject of this study. Sea Posts are worked by postal or postally-paid clerks, Ship Posts by Purser's staff. The result is the same: to Provide postal handling at sea.

SEA and SHIP POSTs as they began 100 years ago, remain today a German postal institution. They exist under UPU regulations, one of three basic ways of handling mail POSTED ON THE HIGH SEAS. A second way, UPU-regulated from 1894 and still going strong, is PAQUEBOT Mail, as with Ship Posts, thanks largely to hobbyists rather than travellers. This is mail POSTED AT SEA but with no shipboard handling other than to bundle it or hand in a few "LOOSE LETTERS". The receiving port post office then marks the mail item off-stamps with PAQUEBOT or an equivalent, or on-stamps with a PAQUEBOT cancel to explain acceptance, say, in San Francisco, of mail from a foreign ship with foreign postage. The PAQUEBOT procedure prevents postage dueing.

The third way of handling HIGH SEAS MAIL, developed by usage rather than plan, became accepted by postal authorities: use of a shipboard mark with the ship's or line's name, on mail handed in to speed getting it on the way, usually after closing of the port's post office, with only occasional vessels calling.

In the former Dutch East Indies, Koninklijke Paketvaart Maatschppij ships applied oval marks to mail handed in at the many small ports in the archipelago as the fastest and surest way to get it to its destination. A similar need was met by the

United Fruit Co., growing bananas in Central and South America. From 1912 into the 50s many of its ships used POSTED ON THE HIGH SEAS/Purser's Office markings, with date, on mail handed in at loading ports. Postal authorities accepted such procedures because the "cancels" did what they wanted: identify the date and source of mail ON THE STAMP. Such services died because few of the wartime losses of passenger ships were replaced, and with the extinction of regular-route liner services by air travel.

In the West Indies, from the 1870s until war in 1914, the Hamburg-American Line, HAPAG for short in German, provided an inter-islands postal service, and 1900-1914, with the U.S., of such frequency that local people posted their mail on ships before departure rather than in the post office. The Purser's office applied an oval POSTED ON HIGH SEAS or other ship-company name marking.

HAPAG with Reichspost approval issued a stamp 1875-79 to speed such mails.

HAPAG will be frequently mentioned in connection with German SEA/SHIP POSTs. So will the Norddeutscher Lloyd, NDL, of Bremen, the Hamburg-South American Line (HSDG), and the Woermann and Deutsch Ost-Afrika (DOAL) Lines. The great bulk of such mails originated from these lines, founded in the 1847-1890 period. Nearly 100 of the some 260 cancels herein described are from Lloyd ships.

Although the German states had traded abroad for centuries, they became one nation only with the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-71. Chancellor Otto von Bismarck initially opposed colonies as diverting from the need to build a united nation. In the 1880s he accepted the idea they were a part of being a world power. In 1884, the Berlin Conference of European Powers met to prevent conflict in colonial claims. It was the go-ahead for Germany. In 1884-86 it acquired large areas in Africa and the Pacific.

In 1885, to support colonial development and trade the Reichspost contracted with Norddeutscher Lloyd for subsidized Imperial Mail Steamship routes to and in the Far East and Australia. Postmaster General von Stephan held that "developing colonies without providing this

(shipping) bridge from the homeland is a contradiction. Two main and three feeder lines were to be set up: an East Asiatic Main Line from Bremen to Shanghai with connection to Japan, an Australian Main Line to Sydney with an extension to Tonga and Samoa. And a Mediterranean Line from Italy to Egypt which would catch up with passengers and mail to the ships that had left Bremen a week earlier. Fifteen ships were required, faster than any NDL then had in service. This not only helped develop a German shipbuilding industry, but it provided German means of transport for German goods and travellers. The first ships for Shanghai and Sydney left mid-1886. Their progress was occasion for Germans en route to gather festively. And the SEA POST services on all these ships meant that Germans along the routes could use them as post offices, speeding their mails with German stamps, later even getting Registry service. The benefits were so great that most other German shipping routes were so equipped: to the U.S. and the rest of the Americas, Africa and Oceania. NDL gave foreign government employees a discount to "travel German". Even when passengers, crews and local people used stamps obtained ashore, these were accepted without penalty. On the African coasts at times the ships in this way provided coastwise mail service without compensation to the Reichspost.

On the North Atlantic, in December, 1890 Postmaster General Wanamaker and Reichspost chief von Stephan reached agreement for a U.S.-German and a German-American Sea Post to start April, 1891 to New York, on NDL ships from Bremen and HAPAG ships from Hamburg. Rationale for the binational service was to speed mail deliveries. About one-third of the sacked mail carried was resorted by the U.S. and German clerks en route. This allowed immediate onward dispatch on arrival. Mekeel's Weekly Stamp News of 23 December, 1891 commented "It would seem that the ocean post offices established on board German steamers in the trans-Atlantic passenger trade are much more utilized and prove to be a greater convenience than expected. On a recent voyage of Hamburg-American Company's steamer FÜRST BISMARCK, some 250 letters and postcards for European destinations were posted on board after leaving Cuxhaven for New York during the first 24 hours. They were landed at Southampton already sorted so that they

could be dispatched without delay." U.S.-German Sea Post cancels were applied on the eastward voyage, Deutsch-Amerikanische Seepost on the westward leg. The service was only on German ships 1891-1914. In the 20s and 30s, U.S. ships also carried the dual sea posts. They expired in 1939 with war.

In 1895, MARINE SHIP POSTs began on the Far East and Australian stations as the fleet followed colonial development and trade. Reference to MSPs is limited to their relationship to the merchant-ship Sea Posts in this record. MSPs have been reported in historical detail by Captain Fr. Crüsemann.

In 1898, the Shantung Peninsula in China was leased. This made Germany a major factor in ending the Boxer Uprising, 1900-01. In 1899, Germany bought the Carolines, Marianas and Palau Islands after Spain lost the war with the U.S. The U.S. and Germany divided the Samoan islands, giving each a base in mid-Pacific. Britain was bought off with concessions in the Solomons. Thus, in 1900 Germany was a world power: her flag flew over some thirteen million peoples and 1,017,000 square miles overseas. What since 1947 have been the U.S. Trust Territories in the Pacific, an area the extent of the 48 states, was German.

The Imperial mail steamers provided invaluable transport services for the German military during the Boxer uprising, and 1904-07 of the Hereros in German Southwest Africa, now Namibia. During such service the ships kept their Sea Posts. Where they did not have these, Marine Ship Posts were supplied.

After 1899 renewal of NDL's mail subsidy contract, it bought ships and services to build an integrated network from the Bay of Bengal to the China coast. Additional sea posts in New Guinea and to Samoa were planned for late 1914 and 1915 but war ended everything.

By 1914, Germany had the world's largest shipping company, HAPAG, the world's largest passenger carrying line, NDL. Services were so extensive that, as an example, eleven ships a month called at Togo, Germany's smallest colony in Africa. Then "The Lights Went Out All Over Europe." With war, German shipping disappeared from the seas. What had refuged in neutral waters in time was seized: 109 ships in US waters in 1917, 70 by Portugal, etc. Most of what was left was delivered to the Allies under the Treaty of Versailles.

In contrast to what happened in WW II, Germany was not invaded or largely destroyed by the first war. It made a rapid comeback, in part with U.S. loans that let it meet its reparations to the Allies. In 1919, a new start was made with a handful of small ships not ceded to the Allies. Within 27 months of the Armistice the first prewar Sea Post again was in service to West Africa. Others followed, and new lines and Sea or Ship Posts as this record details. The idea of shipboard postal handling again proved itself, as it had in the 1886-1914 period.

The 1921 setting of U.S. immigration quotas changed the nature and volume of Atlantic passenger shipping. Steerage was replaced by Tourists. Emphasis of Ship Posts changed. In the 20s and 30s a variety of routes and cancels as diverse as pre-1914 came into use. The depression 30s brought cruises to Scandinavia and the Mediterranean as a way to keep ships occupied. Hamburg-South American Line used 22 different flags added to its regular Hamburg-South America Ship Post cancel, to identify areas of cruising. Longer cruises like Round-South-America or the West Indies were geared to the U.S. market despite the growing boycott of German business because of the Nazis.

A gradual shift from SEA POSTs, paid for by the postal service, to SHIP POSTs, worked with ship-paid personnel, began with Hamburg-South America's flag cancels in 1925. Ship excursions during philatelic gatherings were given Ship Posts, as were occasional vessels in 1931 on the Hamburg-New York run. The last Sea Posts issued were in the 1930s for HAPAG's World Cruises, an adjusted cancel from 1924, and 1935-38, new Hamburg-New York German-American Sea Posts. All other new cancels of the 30s were Ship Posts, and every one issued postwar, starting in 1951. In 1964, East Germany opened Sea Posts on two vessels, now out of service, and 1985 on a third ship.

In 1971, the author made an overnight trip from Harwich to Hamburg on PRINZ HAMLET with a HAMBURG-HARWICH Ship Post. I inquired at the Purser's office about handling of mail posted on board. A young lady assistant replied "I am the Ship Post." And she handled my mail, including applying a ship-silhouette.

Bedarf (non-philatelic) mailings from Ship Posts since their 1951 resumption are most difficult to find, even from ferry runs in

daily use on the North and Baltic Seas. It is almost entirely collectors who keep the record of Ship Post usage going. That does not mean the original intent for their use: to provide crews and passengers with an easy way to mail writings done on the High Seas, does not still exist. In 1985, the EUROPA's cruise cancel was replaced. The first one had worn out, although it was a steel die.

In 1986, a very few Ships Posts remain: North and Baltic Sea ferries, EUROPA's cruise cancels, and three Polar-Oceanic research vessels away months at a time, mail handled by supply vessels or helicopters. Non-German uses are limited to cruise-promoting "cancels" on Norwegian and some other cruise liners.

Despite this reduced supply of current and new Ship Posts, the field remains very active. The task of researching, cataloguing and describing routes, ships and cancels continues. Many aspects of old markings and usages remain unknown for lack of actual examples and records. One could expect with the volume of mail handled by most Sea/Ship Posts that the record would be fairly complete. This is not so. Despite some Sea Posts operating for years: Hamburg-Philadelphia four years, the East India Line from Bremen to Calcutta for nine, and Singapore-New Guinea for 4½ years, so few entires have survived from these and other runs that much remains to be discovered: did HAPAG use a POLARFAHRT cruise cancel 1913-14? Did it again use the NORDLANDFAHRT before 1927 for cruising to Norway and Polar areas?

An example: NDL opened a passenger service Bremen-Canada in 1928. The eminent German collector Josef Dahmann wrote the Sea Post was in use 1930-31. But only 1930 entires have been reported. Yet all the new-style cancels of the Bremen-Canada type were issued in 1926-28 when new NDL routes or ships went into service. On this, the author has made the considered decision that the Sea Post ran 1928-30, subject to new discoveries. Many marks would not be available except for collectors like Herr Dahmann who for fifty years sent out, collected and reported on German ship mails.

Dating of cancels and usages is a problem. One finds cancels with date BEFORE that in the message. Probably some cancels were set on a weekly basis. Or a single date-setting was used on a long run such as the 2,100 miles from Aden to

Colombo. There are also impossible dates that have gone through the mails. A 1900 Hamburg-South America Sea Post is dated 1919. A 1971 cover from the BREMEN bears a 1984 date. NDL sold the ship in 1972. A few presumed dates have been supplied. Cancels remained on board some West Indies, Central and South America and Africa vessels caught abroad September, 1939. U.P.U. rules forbid in-port use of ship posts. Such use may have occurred. None is recorded. All dates are German: Day-Month-Year. * Before or after a date of use means possibly in use earlier or later. Letters and numbers in cancels do not always show.

Scarcity ratings are: C-Current-Common; S-Scarce; R-Rare; LP-Hobbyist's Price. The terms are relative. HAPAG cancels are mostly C but any one of the 46 ships can be hard to find. Pre-1914 U.S.-German and Deutsch-Amerikanische Sea Posts are fairly common, but not in good condition. While a Philatelic item may be C, a Bedarf, genuinely used item, may be S. Rarity extends to what German collectors label LP-Liebhaberpreis: Hobbyist value. Whatever a collector wishes to pay. If five Bedarf entires exist of KAISER WILHELM II or KRONPRINZ WILHELM in the 1914 flag cancels, it may be high. One can always hope, as the author found a Hamburg-Philadelphia II Bedarf card, a rarity.

The author's credentials for preparing this catalog and history are based on a lifetime exposure to German shipping. My parents met on NDL's RHEIN; my Father was 40 years with the Lloyd, as officer, Captain to Chief Marine Superintendent. I dedicate this work to their memory. Also on

35 years of collecting, research, worldwide correspondence and writing about Ship Mails, including PAQUEBOT catalogues of Scandinavia, Africa and Asia published by Christie's Robson Lowe; membership in the Maritime Postmark Society affiliate of American Philatelic Society, seven years as Editor of its SEAPOSTER, as well as the ship Post Study Group in Germany (ARGE), and the TPO & Seapost Society of Britain. The author acknowledges his great debt to these groups and their members. My thanks especially to Gustav Lund, fellow-collector and friend of some 35 years, ever ready with information and counsel. And my debt to Alan Doyle who, as President of MPS, rebuilt it to international standing, and his urging to produce this record "before it's too late." Sadly, it is too late for him. His many friends cherish his memory.

Instead of a strictly chronological sequence the author has chosen to group cancels by commonality. The purpose is to provide a record of merchant Ship Posts, the history of use, along with some details of the ships involved. It has been a rewarding experience: collecting, researching, recording **A Thread From The Skein Of History**. Any errors are the author's who, as fellow postal historians know, has had to deal with the jigsaw puzzle of "facts". Corrections and extensions will be greatly appreciated.

December, 1986
Berkeley, California



GLOSSARY

Angur Agentur	Agency	Kriegsflotte	War Navy
Aktiengesellschaft	Corporation	Kreuzfahrt	Cruise
Aptiert	Excised	Kurs	Course, Schedule
Auf Hoher See	On High Seas	Küste	Run Coast
Bahnpost	R.P.O.	Linie	Line, Route
Bedarf	Genuine Use	LP	Collector Price
Bodensee	Lake Constance	Meeresforschung	Seas Research
Briefstempel	Letter Cancel	Mittelmeer	Mediterranean
Capstadt	Cape Town	NDL	Norddeutscher Lloyd
Dampfer	Steamer	Nordkap	North Cape
Dampfschiff	Steamship	Nordland	Northlands (Scandinavia)
D.G.	Company	Ost	East
Dienst	Service	Ostsee	Baltic Sea
DOAL	German East Africa Line	Postamt	Post Office
Erste	First	Reichspost	Imperial Mails
Eismeer	Ice Sea	R.P.D.	Imperial Mail
Fährschiff	Ferry	Rundfahrt	Steamer Cruise Around
Fahrt	Cruise, Trip	Schleuse	Ship Lock
Frühling	Spring	Schnell	Express
Funkspruch	Wireless	Schwarz	Black
Gauturn	Provincial	Seebäderdiest	Sea Resort Service
Glückliche Inseln	Fortunate Isles (Canaries)	Skagerrak	Jutland (Battle)
HAGO	Nazi	Silvester	New Year's
HAPAG	Organization	Stempel	Cancel
Haupt	Hamburg-American	Süd	South
HSDG	Packet Co.	Tageblatt	Daily News
Hilfe	Main	Tauchboot	Diving Boat
Hochsommer	Hamburg South- American Line	Vergnügungs	Pleasure
Insel	Aid	Vogelflug	Bird's Flight
Ins. Westl.	High Summer	Walfangflotte	Whale-Catching Fleet
Jungfern	Island	Walfangmutterschiff	Whale-Catching Mother Ship
Kais(erliche)	Into Western.	W.F.M.	Christmas
Kraft Durch Freude	Maiden	Weihnacht	World
	Imperial	Welt	
	Strength	Zahlmeister	Purser
	Through Joy	Zweig	Branch

HAPAG opened service to the West Indies in 1871, soon expanded it to Central America and northern South America. It issued 1875-79 a 10c. Private Postage Stamp. In 1900, it bought the British "Atlas Service" for the growing West Indies-U.S. trade. Its ships used oval "Posted on High Seas" marks as cancellers (p. 109). Expansion of service to Mexico via Cuba led to this Sea Post:

14. HAMBURG-MEXICO: I-XIII (S) 8.4.1903-1914

No. XIV was prepared, is not known used until after the war with route excised (#128).

Again used I-III (see also #71). (S) 1922-1932

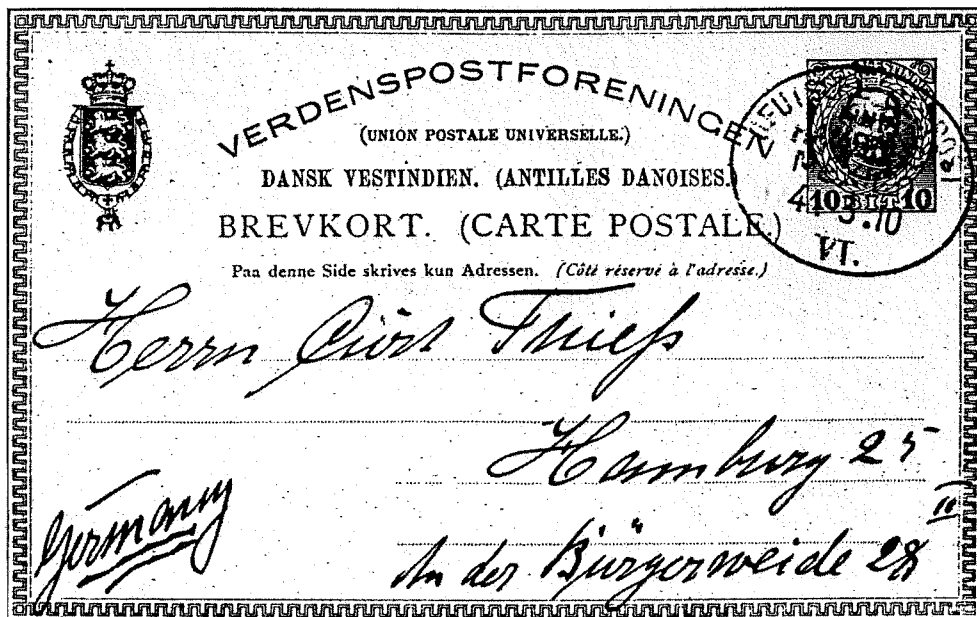


15. HAMBURG-PHILADELPHIA: I-IV (LP) 28.10.1910-1914

Although served by HAPAG's intermediate steamers for four years, this Sea Post is a great rarity. Possibly 10-15 entires exist.

16. BREMEN-NEW YORK: R: (S to R) 27.2.1912-1914

There was no Sea Post Registry on the Bremen-New York route. Sorting of registered mails en route was done by the U.S. and German Sea Post clerks. This sorting Registry mark is known only as a backstamp, almost entirely on mails from Hungary.



An Bord Linie von Habana
 M. S. „St. Louis“ d. 26.5.
 der Hamburg-Amerika-Linie
 Brutto-Register-Tons 16732, Länge 165,77 m,
 Breite 22 m, Maschinenkraft 12000 PS,
 Geschwindigkeit 16 Seemeilen.

Stach herzlichster glück-
 licher Fahrbt Skurz
 vor dem vorläufigen
 Ziel senden wir
 Ihnen die besten
 Grüße und wünschen
 Ihnen alles Gute
 Hoffentlich sind Sie
 Herzl. Grüsse
 N. Ball

Photo-Hartz Verlag Hans Andres, Hamburg 1

Herrn
 König



Berlin-Weissensee
 (Germany)
 Grunelsh 66

Card written on the ST. LOUIS 26.5.1939, the day before arrival in Havana with 937 Jewish refugees seeking a haven but denied entry. They were taken back to Europe, accepted by Britain, France, Holland and Belgium. Also used on seven cruises from New York by ST. LOUIS 30.6.-25.8.1939 after the Havana voyage.

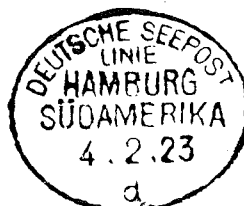
In 1923, the first new Sea Posts and cancels came into use as ships were built or bought and prewar routes resumed. Most later were used on intermediate vessels as larger and faster ships became available.

68. BREMEN-CUBA: a-c (S) 9.1923-1933

This route operated with ships of the Norddeutscher Lloyd.

69. HAMBURG-SÜDAMERIKA: a-e (S) 1923-1935

70. OST-AFRIKA LINIE: k, l, m, o, s (S) 1923-1936



WEST INDIES SERVICES

In late 1930, there was an exchange of ships between NDL and H. Schuldt & Co., Flensburg. NDL took over the Mexico service with its two motorships which had been using #71 HAMBURG-MEXICO Sea Post. This new route cancel shows D. (Steamer) but the ships were motor vessels. The service ended when the two ships were laid up Winter 1932-33. In 1934, NDL intended to reopen its pre-WWI Sydney-Hong Kong service. The ships were bought by Burns, Philp & Co. for its Sydney-Singapore and Sydney-Hong Kong services.

- 119. HAMBURG-BREMEN-MEXIKO: D. RIO BRAVO** (R) 27.5.1931-1932*
D. RIO PANUCO (R) 8.4.1931-1932*



With entry of HAPAG's CARIBIA and CORDILLERA into service, ORINOCO on 4.3.1933 resumed the line's service to Havana-Mexico. 1935, IBERIA, ex MAGDALENA, joined her.

- 120. HAMBURG-CUBA-MEXICO: MS IBERIA** (S) 26.8.1936-2.9.1939
MS ORINOCO (S) 18.9.1936-1.4.1941

The ORINOCO refuged in Mexico when war broke. Cancel and some crew remained on board. She was seized by Mexico on 1.4.1941, served later as the U.S. Transport PUEBLA.

- 121. HAMBURG-WESTINDIEN: MS CARIBIA** (S) 7.9.1936-2.9.1939
MS CORDILLERA (S) 5.10.1936-10.2.1940

Cordillera reached Murmansk 10.9.1939 after war broke, got to Germany on 8.2.1940.

Fraülein

M.S. "RIO-Bravo"

Herta Bittcher.

Hannover.

Bödenstr. 11

