

Leaving for America

For this column, I am pleased to be able to reprint the next in a series of articles that were written by Mr. Gene Aksamit, a colleague of mine in the Czechoslovak Genealogical Society International (CGSI) and resident of the Twin Cities:

In the next few columns I plan to change the focus from vital records to leaving for America – how our Czech ancestors were enticed to leave, how they traveled to an emigration port, where the emigration ports were located, the voyage, and arriving in America.

The decision to leave their homeland for a new country far away across an ocean must have been a very difficult one. So why did they choose to leave? Certainly there were various reasons, but the prospects for better economic opportunities and avoidance of military conscription for their sons were frequently the reasons. While forced labor which was in existence under serfdom was abolished after the 1848 uprising, economic conditions actually worsened for both unskilled laborers and skilled tradesmen as demand for their services fell in the ensuing years. In the meantime, the Homestead Act of 1862 in the U.S. made the prospect of free land very attractive and many Czechs emigrated because they wanted a larger piece of land.

1896

Kares & Stotzky
29 Bahnhofstrasse 29
B R E M E N .

— úředně oprávnění výpravci parolodí —

Jediný český závod pro výpravu cestujících,
zásydky peněz a zboží do všech zemí
zámořských.

Adresa pro telegramy: Kares—Bremen.

Odejzd lodi ustanoven až na další změny takto:

Z Bremen do New Yorku.
Plavba oceánem trvá 7–8 dní.

I. Rychloděj expresní z Bremen do New Yorku:

Leh.. v úterý	21.ledna	Saale.. v pátek	10.dubna	Trave.. v úterý	9.června	Spree.. v úterý	11.června
Spree.. v úterý	28. "	Saale.. v úterý	14. "	Spree.. v úterý	16. "	Aller.. v pátek	14. "
Aller.. v úterý	4.února	Saale.. v pátek	21. "	Aller.. v pátek	19. "	Lahn.. v úterý	18. "
Havel.. v úterý	11. "	Allan.. v pátek	24. "	Lahn.. v úterý	20. "	Elbe.. v úterý	25. "
Malše.. v úterý	18. "	Lahn.. v úterý	28. "	Havel.. v úterý	30. "	Saale.. v pátek	28. "
Saale.. v úterý	25. "	Havel.. v úterý	5.května	Saale.. v pátek	3.června	Trave.. v úterý	1.čárí
Aller.. v úterý	8.března	Saale.. v pátek	8. "	Trave.. v úterý	7. "	Spree.. v úterý	8. "
Havel.. v úterý	10. "	Trave.. v úterý	12. "	Spree.. v úterý	14. "	Aller.. v pátek	11. "
Ems.. v úterý	17. "	Saale.. v pátek	17. "	Aller.. v pátek	17. "	Lahn.. v úterý	15. "
Spree.. v úterý	24. "	Lahn.. v úterý	26. "	Havel.. v úterý	28. "	Havel.. v úterý	22. "
Aller.. v úterý	31. "	Havel.. v úterý	2.června	Saale.. v pátek	31. "	Trave.. v úterý	29. "
Havel.. v úterý	7.dubna	Saale.. v pátek	5. "	Trave.. v úterý	4.srpna	Spree.. v úterý	6.října

Cena přeplavní: v meziplánu 150 marků nebo asi 80 zl. r. ē.
v II. kajutě 250 marků nebo asi 140 zl. r. ē.
v I. kajutě 300 az 400 marků

Zá děti od 1 do 12 let platí se polovinou, za kojence 6 zl. r. ē.

II. Parolodě poštovní z Bremen do New Yorku:
plavba oceánem trvá 11–12 dní.

H. H. Meier	v sobotu 25.ledna	Weimar	v sobotu 14.března	Stuttgart	v sobotu 9.května
Weimar	v sobotu 8.unora	Stuttgart	v sobotu 29.února	H. H. Meier	v sobotu 26. "
Stuttgart	v sobotu 15. "	H. H. Meier	v sobotu 11.dubna	Weimar	v sobotu 2.června
H. H. Meier	v sobotu 29. "	Weimar	v sobotu 25. "	Stuttgart	v sobotu 21. "

Cena přeplavní pro meziplánu obnáší 140 marků čili asi 83 zl. r. ē.
deti od 1 do 12 let platí polovinou, pod 1 rok 6 zl. r. ē.

Přímá pravidelná rychloploplavba bez přesedání.

The actual obligations of military conscription seemed to change frequently under the 300 years of rule by the Habsburgs. In 1866, the idea of universal obligation to serve became Austrian policy and most men between 21 and 23 faced induction. The 12-year service obligation could be divided among active duty, national guard (Landwehr), and reserves.

With the frequent conflicts, lengthy service was a real possibility. An interesting twist is that some land speculators successfully used the scare of military service to convince some families to leave and to sell them their property at a low price¹.

Beginning in the 1850s, emigration agents working for shipping companies went out into various villages and towns to recruit emigrants to pass through the ports of Bremen or Hamburg. The agents provided favorable reports of the New World from earlier emigrants and posted notices and ads (see illustration) for the shipping companies. Some of the agents were unscrupulous and took advantage of unsuspecting emigrants. One such incident² occurred when several families from the Pilsen, Bohemia area contacted an agent in Hamburg requesting to be sent to Nebraska. Instead, they arrived in the port of Auckland, New Zealand in June 1863! The agent was receiving bonus money from the English for bringing immigrants to New Zealand. After 1862, U.S. railroad companies also actively promoted emigration in Europe because they had land given to them by the U.S. Government as part of the Homestead Act of 1862 to sell. It was not uncommon for these ads to tout exaggerated claims. Some examples: The Great Southwest (Texas and Oklahoma) – “crop failures are unheard of and produce grows in great abundance”; Nebraska – “unequaled for its beauty of scenery”; northern Minnesota – “moderate climate, soil more fertile than Iowa’s”.

Understanding the conditions that existed and the various reasons that our ancestors emigrated is an important part of our family history.

¹ Dubovický, Ivan, *Czech Emigration Patterns: A European View*. Ročenka, CGSI Journal Volume 4, 2000

² Svejda, Dr. George J., *Castle Garden as an Immigrant Depot, 1855 – 1890*. Washington: National Park Service, 1968

Mluvíte Česky? Do You Speak Czech?

Ranní ptáče dál doskáče - An early bird will hop farther

As a rule, you should always stress the first syllable of a Czech word!

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