

Ships of our ancestors

Not long ago, I discovered the thrill of locating photos of the ships which brought my ancestors, along with millions of others, to these shores. In front of me were the actual pictures of the ship on which my forebearers walked the decks, spent hours sharing what they had heard from others and finally experienced the joy of arrival at their destination.

During the great pilgrimage by sea that our ancestors made to this country to seek a new life for themselves and for those who followed, they experienced many sleepless nights, afraid of the new life ahead, and yet fearful of the one they left behind. Many of us have listened to older relatives describe these long voyages where they suffered from sickness, poor sanitary conditions and little food.

To the generations that followed, the immigration experience of our ancestors was hard to fathom. We heard about it, we saw documents and passengers' records; however, the fact still remains that "a picture is worth a thousand words".

Not long ago, as a surprise for Father's Day, I had an 8 x 10 black and white photo framed with the inscription: "Molly Ochs Zuckerman, Hamberg to Philadelphia, March 25, 1913, SS Prinz Oskar" and presented it to my father. It is not often that tears come to his eyes, but that photo reminded him of her long trip from the village of Sudilkov in the Ukraine to St. Louis with four small children. Her husband, who had arrived three years earlier was waiting there for her.

The nostalgia of the past, sooner or later, infects most of us, more so as we get older. Ancestors are very special people. Because conditions which they could no longer bear, they sought and found a new country where they made new lives for themselves and those who followed. The most important and perilous part of their journey was over the Atlantic Ocean where each voyage was an epic in itself.

Once I obtained photos of the ships which brought my grandparents to these shores, my curiosity extended to the vessels themselves. These photos represent a visual confirmation of their voyage.

When I obtained a photo of the S.S. Celtic (Liverpool to



Roots and Branches

by Miriam Weiner

New York) December 19, 1912, I was fascinated to read the ship description which included these facts: "First steamship to exceed 20,000 tons. Maiden voyage: July 26, 1901 from Liverpool to New York. Went aground in a dense fog at entrance to Queenstown Harbor, December 10, 1928 and became a total loss. Dismantled by shipbreakers in 1933, as she was a danger to navigation. Note: These liners were noted for their steadiness in bad weather!!!" (emphasis added).

We are fortunate that there are societies and museums dedicated to the preservation of the history of ships which house extensive libraries and photo collections. For a fee, it is possible to obtain data on your ancestor's ship and a photo.

One of the largest collections is located at: Steamship Historical Society of America, University of Baltimore Library, 1420 Maryland Ave., Baltimore, MD 21201. They will advise you of their holdings and the cost of reproduction of photos and historical material.

A valuable reference is the Morton Allen Director of European Passenger Steamship Arrivals: 1890-1930 (Genealogical Publishing Co., Inc., Baltimore, 1987). It includes a chronological listing of ship arrival dates with name of steamship company, port of entry, vessel name, and port of embarkation.

A friend recently introduced me to "postcard shows" and while browsing at a large one held annually in New York City, I found many post cards of ships. One which

captured my attention was of the SS Prinz Friedrich Wilhelm which included a foldout set of smaller photos depicting the interior of the ship the cafe, promenadedeck, state-room, dining rooms and staircase.

I have since located advertisements for the shipping lines, menus, old steamship tickets, and other memorabilia from those trips. My collection includes copies of several "Passegier-Liste" printed by the Hamburg-Amerika Line listing names of passengers and the crew along with avail-abservices such as meals, baggage, smoking, storage of valuables, medical facilities, library, and barber shop.

Although there are many fine sources for ship photos and their history, you can begin with Passenger Liners of the World Since 1893 by Nicholas T. Cairis, (Bonanza Books, New York, 1979) which provides a nostalgic look at 211 ships and their history. See also Passenger Ships of the World: Past and Present by Eugene W. Smith (George H. Dean Company, Boston, MA, 1978) which lists more than 3,000 vessels and their histories from 1840 to 1977. It includes more than 200 photographs covering all the major style classifications as well as the unusual, some reproduced from rare museum collections. Both books include an alphabetical index for easy reference.

A Beginner's Kit on how to research your family history which includes charts, list of archives and libraries, bibliography, maps, family group sheets and more can be ordered from: Miriam Weiner, 136 Sandpiper Key, Secaucus, NJ 07094; (cost: \$10 + \$1 postage/handling)

ILLIANA NEWS, January, 1989