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Nadell, Pamela Susan

THE JOURNEY TO AMERICA BY STEAM: THE JEWS OF EASTERN
EUROPE IN TRANSITION

The Ohio State University

PH.D. 1982

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THE JOURNEY TO AMERICA BY STEAM: THE JEWS OF
EASTERN EUROPE IN TRANSITION

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate
School of The Ohio State University

By

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The Ohio State University

1982

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INTRODUCTION

Migration has been and remains one of the central themes of Jewish history. Biblical scholars trace the wanderings of the Ancient Israelites. Medieval Jewish historians focus on the expulsions of the Jews from Western Europe. Modern Jewish historians examine the demographic shifts that led to the creation of new Jewish communities in Palestine, South America, and the United States. Even in this last quarter of the twentieth century, significant changes in the distribution of world Jewry have occurred, as Soviet Jews fled to Israel and America, and as large numbers of Israelis settled in the United States and Canada.¹

In the past these demographic shifts shaped the very fabric of Jewish history. Migrations contributed to the decline or disappearance of major Jewish communities, while they facilitated the emergence of entirely new and important Jewries. After the destruction of the First Temple in Jerusalem in 586 B.C.E., Nebuchadnezzar deported the Judeans who laid the foundations for the subsequently vital and creative Babylonian Jewish community. A handful of Jews, expelled from Spain and Portugal at the end of the fifteenth century, paved the way for the re-emergence of Jewish communities in Western Europe in the early modern era. And the migration of the Jews from Eastern Europe in the wake of nineteenth and twentieth century violence, poverty, and traditional anti-Jewish sentiment built the American Jewish community into the pre-eminent world Jewry of the post-Holocaust period.

When scholars have studied this latter migration, they have focused their attention on one of two topics -- either the forces that compelled the emigration or the cultural shock and adjustment that these immigrants made to America. One subject, however, has remained relatively unexplored; that is, a study of the journey that the East European Jews made from the old world to the new. Typical histories of the East European Jewish emigration have either ignored or included limited discussions of this transmigration. Yet, surely the phenomenon of some 2,000,000 Jews, by and large inexperienced in transcontinental travel, crossing half the globe deserves more consideration than a simple notation of the accomplished population transfer.²

In fact, the subject of migration suggests numerous questions. How did these emigrants actually get from Russia or Austria or Hungary to America? What happened to them on the way? What kinds of accommodations did they find? What was the impact of the laws of their native lands, of the countries over which they traveled, and of the United States? How did this migration affect the countries of transmigration? What assistance did these Jewish emigrants receive from their western co-religionists? And most certainly, what impact did this journey which bridged the old and new worlds, have upon this traditional community. This study considers these issues as it documents the migration of the East European Jews in the years 1868-1914.

The multi-national and broad cross-cultural sweep of this migration makes this a complex subject. The East European Jews formed but a part of the mass migration from Eastern and Southern Europe that began in the latter half of the nineteenth century. As with any minority history, it has proven both impossible and generally undesirable to isolate at all times the behavior patterns of the Jewish emigrants-in-transit from those of other emigrants. This demographic shift impinged not only upon the countries of emigration and immigration, but also upon the countries of transmigration. The emigration legislation of their respective lands, the immigration laws of the United States, and the rules of the most important countries of transmigration -- notably Germany and England -- all affected the emigrants. Furthermore, the Jews of Eastern Europe emigrated not only from Russia, but also from Austria and Hungary. Consequently, in order to document the history of the East European Jewish transmigration, this study has had to contend not only with the concerns inherent in writing ethnic history, but also with the complexities of a subject that spanned half a dozen countries and half the globe.

Isolating those factors that distinguished the Jewish emigrants-in-transit, however, brings this study into the discipline of Jewish history. In several respects, the Jewish transmigration differed from the journey of other East European emigrants. The vast majority of the East European Jews emigrated illegally. This unlawful emigration forced them to make all transportation arrangements in secret

and to risk their lives in stealing furtively out of their native lands. Since the language barrier of Yiddish cut these emigrants off from other travelers, a distinctive Jewish emigration business developed in areas of substantial Jewish population. Moreover, the Jews were the only major group of emigrants to transmigrate over nations in which large numbers of their brethren held citizenship. And finally, as emigrants-in-transit, both on land and at sea, the Jews were often singled out for special treatment. In some cases these policies revealed anti-Jewish animus. In others, these accommodations to their unique dietary and ritual observances resulted from the intercession of western Jews. These distinguishing factors were decidedly sufficient to warrant a separate study of the journey of the East European Jews to America.

The scope of this topic suggested numerous avenues for research. Not surprisingly, since most East European Jews emigrated to America, United States government documents contained rich materials about transmigration. In the same years that American nativists pushed to restrict immigration and while others dealt with the challenges these immigrants posed to America society, various congressional committees, special government agents, and occasionally even the courts turned to the problems of the transmigrants. Their studies of the conditions in the countries of greatest emigration and of the situation of the emigrants-in-transit resulted in legislation designed both to screen out unhealthy immigrants and to protect the health and safety of the emigrants en route to America.³

While this legislation had limited impact upon emigration arrangements in the nations of greatest emigration, it did affect the countries of substantial transmigration. In Germany, U.S. immigration laws raised the issue of unrestricted transmigration that ultimately led to the establishment of the border control stations. After 1894, all emigrants crossing Germany, which included most East European Jews, had to pass through these checkpoints. At the major ports of embarkation -- for the Jews, Hamburg, Bremen, and Liverpool -- the foreign steamship companies had to accede to U.S. demands for a medical inspection of all emigrants in order to determine their fitness to immigrate to America. As a result local officials and the western Jewish philanthropies had to deal with the problems of the transmigrants denied permission to continue their journeys. American legislation, however, could do nothing about the overcrowded and overpriced accommodations common at many European emigrant hotels. But since the U.S. asserted authority over all vessels permitted to land at American ports, once the emigrants boarded ship, they journeyed under the protection of the passenger laws of the United States.

While the records of the U.S. government, especially the numerous reports of investigators sent to Europe to look into emigration affairs, furnish much information on migration, other sources shed light on the particular situation of the East European Jewish emigrants. Records from western Jewish philanthropies deal with the relationship between the East European emigrants and their western

co-religionists. Jewish periodicals furnished information on the situation of the travelers in England and Germany. But the most valuable source for this history of the Jewish transmigrants has been the words of the emigrants themselves. The memoirs and autobiographies of American Jewish immigrants contain a wealth of information and provide the color for what was a very real human drama. Nearly every memoirist or autobiographer had something to say about his or her journey. What it was like to deal with the agents, the trauma of separation, the ordeal of crossing the border, the tension in the control stations, the hustlers and tricksters who haunted the ports, the kindness of the western Jewish philanthropies, the fear of being turned away, the voyage in steamship steerage, and the concern for the continued observance of Jewish traditions -- are all confronted in the memoir literature.

The results of this research delineated four major stages in the journey of the East European Jewish transmigrants: departure from the homeland; the voyage across Europe; the delay at the seaports; and the journey to America in steamship steerage. The opening chapter on U.S. steerage legislation furnishes background for this study, for these American laws affected the fate of all emigrants-in-transit. The discussion then moves to Europe to examine the role that the agents of the steamship companies played in arranging the emigration of the East European Jews and to describe the transmigration of this people across Europe en route to America. Since most East European Jews crossed Germany in order to embark from the

major North Sea ports, the special arrangements made by the German authorities for the care and reception of these transmigrants and the steps taken by German Jews to insure the welfare of their co-religionists are evaluated. But since many East European Jews also sailed to America from Liverpool and since many others spent weeks waiting in Hamburg or Bremen for the departure of their ship, the arrangements made in these seaports to accommodate the Jewish travelers are considered separately. And finally, the journey to America by steam is described -- the crossing in steamship steerage, the last stage in this voyage shared by the millions of Europeans who came to America in the decades before World War I and its aftermath closed this nation's doors.

One emigrant described the journey as "a hell that cleanses a man of his sins before coming to the land of Columbus." For many East European Jews, that was just what the voyage was. For others, it was not so terrible. But for all it was a time of uncertainty, as they left behind the security of a world called home to travel to the unknown of a land that some called the goldene medinah -- America.⁴

NOTES

- 1 On the most recent wave of Jewish immigration, see Drora Kass and Seymour Martin Lipset, "America's New Wave of Jewish Immigrants," New York Times 7 Dec. 1980, VI, p. 44.
- 2 Salo W. Baron described the incentives for emigration; The Russian Jew Under Tsars and Soviets (1964; 2nd edition, New York, 1976), pp. 69-74. Moses Rischin covered the East European background, but concentrated on the immigrants as they adapted to their new home; The Promised City: New York's Jews, 1870-1914 (Cambridge, Mass., 1962). Irving Howe's masterful study of the East European Jewish immigration contained a brief discussion of transmigration; World of Our Fathers (New York, 1976), pp. 34-46. Philip Taylor's general study of European emigration briefly covered the transmigration of the East European Jews in his discussion of the journey in steamship steerage; The Distant Magnet: European Emigration to U.S.A. (New York, 1971), pp. 147-66.
- 3 John Higham's work remains the classic study on American nativism and its success in restricting immigration; Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860-1925 (New Brunswick, N.J., 1955).
- 4 George M. Price, Di Yuden in Amerika (Odessa, 1891), 14f. quoted in Howe, pp. 35-36 and Rischin, p. 33.

Chapter I

U.S. Steerage Legislation:

The Protection of the Emigrants en route to America

In the decades surrounding the turn of the last century (1881-1914), waves of European emigrants bound for America crossed the Atlantic in steamship steerages. These immigrant passengers admittedly found their ocean voyages more tolerable than did those who had traveled in the steerages of the old sailing packets. All too often, however, the gains associated with steamship steerage stemmed not from improved shipboard accommodations, but simply from the faster journey. For the transportation steam revolution meant that these emigrants endured the filthy, overcrowded, physically debilitating steerage for ten to fourteen days rather than weeks or months. During these years of the "new immigration" the United States Congress periodically studied the plight of the emigrants en route to America in steerage and regularly concluded that only protective U.S. legislation could force the steamship companies to ameliorate the conditions of steerage in order to afford every emigrant a safe and healthy journey to the "golden land." Consequently, Congress enacted a number of laws regulating the emigrants' voyage across the Atlantic. In the Passenger Act of 1882 the government set forth the minimum physical requirements for transoceanic steamship steerage. In addition, general immigration legislation, while most often directed at preventing undesirable categories of immigrants from settling in the United States, frequently contained other sections which affected the steamship companies, their agents, officers, and crews.

The United States government, having a vested interest in the physical conditions of the immigrants landing on its shores, had

at various points in the nineteenth century passed steerage legislation. At the onset of the period of the "new immigration" the U.S. Passenger Act of 1855, "An Act to regulate the carriage of passengers in steamships and other vessels," was operative. This law theoretically provided for improved passenger accommodations by mandating that ships' steerages had to offer better ventilation and more air space per passenger than had existed on earlier vessels. In addition, this act required individual berths, adequate cooking facilities, and sufficient food provisions for the steerage passengers; and it attempted to end the chronic problem of steerage overcrowding that had caused so many deaths by fixing the number of passengers that could be carried according to the weight of the vessel.¹

In 1873, aware that nearly twenty years had passed since the last major act affecting the steerage passage and sensitive to the great changes that had occurred in the steerage trade with the coming to dominance of the steamship, the Senate ordered the Secretary of the Treasury to study the conditions of the trans-Atlantic voyage and to report on the treatment of the immigrants on board ship. In January, 1874, Secretary of the Treasury William A. Richardson recommended to the Senate a drastic revision of the existing passenger legislation based upon the reports of the Immigration Service inspectors whom he had appointed to investigate the steerages. This Immigration Service, which intentionally included one woman who could experience the particular perils of female

immigrants traveling alone, found that the Passenger Act of 1855 was not effective. No action for a violation of the Passenger Act of 1855 had ever been successfully carried out against an emigrant vessel. Yet, as one agent recounted, during one month of his investigation he had personally observed over fifty vessels landing in direct violation of existing federal law. Not only did the Immigration Service conclude that the U.S. collectors of customs did not properly enforce the 1855 law, but the agents of the Service had discovered an even more critical problem. The Passenger Act of 1855 did not regulate steamship steerage. Although the act claimed by its subtitle "to regulate the carriage of passengers in steamships," in practice U.S. federal courts had ruled otherwise.²

In 1868 the U.S. government brought charges against a British steamship, The Manhattan, for carrying passengers from Liverpool to New York in berths whose construction, arrangement, and pattern of occupancy failed to meet the standards set by section 2 of the Passenger Act of 1855. In deciding the case Judge Blatchford of the U.S. District Court ruled that most parts of the Passenger Act of 1855 had no jurisdiction over steamships. He pointed out that while the language of the act employed the simple term "any vessel" throughout, one section of this law referred explicitly to steamships. This part (sec. 10) required steam vessels to comply with "only those provisions of the act which relate to the spaces appropriated to the use of passengers." Since only section 1 of the 1855 law regulated the areas allocated to the passengers, the Judge

ruled that only that section applied to steamship steerage. Therefore, by inference, none of the other stipulations of the 1855 law pertaining to sleeping accommodations, food and cooking provisions, or ventilation apparatus affected steamships. In affirming the decision, Judge Nelson of the Circuit Court wrote,

if this term 'any vessel' embraces steam vessels . . . which position the libellants must maintain in order to succeed, then the tenth section is superfluous and unmeaning. Why apply the penalties . . . to steamboats, by special provision if the term 'any vessel' already embraced them? It would be unjust to impute such an absurdity to Congress. It is clear that the law-makers understood the act not to apply to steam vessels, unless where so expressed in terms.

Thus, as the Secretary of the Treasury informed Congress, in 1874, steamships carrying immigrants sailed to the U.S. virtually unregulated by American law.³

In the 1870's, steamship steerages, while for the most part not within the jurisdiction of U.S. law, still had to meet federal standards in allocating to their passengers enough superficial clear deck space and in carrying no more than one passenger for every two tons of ship's weight. Yet, numerous immigrant ships landed with grossly overcrowded steerages because non-compliance with the law brought no penalties. A complex method of computation of legal passenger capacity and the "purely perfunctory" inspections made by the American officials in charge of inspecting these vessels had rendered even this provision of the 1855 Passenger Act inoperative.⁴

But since the date of the last significant U.S. steerage legislation, a major change in transatlantic shipping had occurred. Steamships had come to monopolize the steerage trade. The period from 1855 to 1872 was marked by an evolution in the business of carrying emigrants, resulting in the almost complete substitution of steamships for sailing vessels. In 1850, the Inman Line introduced steerage accommodations on board its steam vessels which until then had exclusively carried cabin passengers. Since these third class accommodations initially remained expensive, they were not considered seriously competitive for the emigrant passengers. During the 1850's, however, other lines, including the German Hamburg-American Packet and the North German Lloyd, added steamships with steerage accommodations. Whereas in 1856, 96.4 per cent of the passengers landing at Castle Garden came via sailing ships, in 1873, only 3.2 per cent of the immigrants landing there had put to sea in sailing vessels. Clearly, in a very short period of time the steamship had succeeded in dominating the emigrant trade.⁵ Yet the 1873 Immigration Service found these very steamers to be virtually unregulated by U.S. law concerning the board they offered the steerage passengers.

The Immigration Service concluded that such lack of regulation had disastrous implications for steamship steerage passengers. A few of the immigration inspectors favorably compared recent steamship steerage to cabin accommodations of a dozen years ago, declaring that there was

little to be desired in the treatment of immigrants on steamships, . . . (since) it is exceedingly doubtful if one per cent of said emigrants were ever so well treated - fed, lodged, and cared for - in their lives before as during their steerage voyage on any average steamship.⁶

Most investigators, however, had a very different impression.

A steerage is not a very comfortable place to inhabit. The condition of the passenger is, indeed, often pitiable. He is confined in a foul-smelling dungeon, where, perhaps, there is not room in the space not occupied by bunks for all the occupants to stand at once; and which, especially when it incloses the smoke-stack, is hot and unhealthy; he is seasick, perhaps becomes covered with vermin; his system is disarranged; he is without proper food for a nauseated stomach; and is forced to associate with companions as badly off as himself, and often composed in part of the filthy, brutal, and depraved.⁷

Obviously such overcrowded, noxious facilities endangered the very health and safety of the steerage passengers.

It became increasingly clear to the members of the Immigration Service and later to Congress that steamships had not succeeded of their own accord in obliterating many of the evils which had plagued passengers on immigrant sailing vessels. Steerage travelers continued to suffer from epidemics, lack of proper food, bad water, and physical brutality on board ship. While the 1873 death rate for steamship immigrants of one per 477 passengers compared most favorably against the sailing packet steerage ratio of one death per 22.2 passengers, this could be viewed excessive when considering that the typical steerage passenger was young and strong. Unhealthy steerage conditions persisted partly because although the Passenger Act of 1855 prohibited any vessel from carrying passengers on the lowest or

orlop deck, these provisions were imperfectly applied vis-à-vis steamships. Even if steamships complied with this law by not locating emigrants on the orlop deck, they still often assigned steerage passengers to decks below the water line. "Thus the darkness, the foul-smelling bilge water, the tainted atmosphere, and kindred evils of the early days were repeated, in a measure, in the steamship." And steerage passengers still contracted the dreaded typhus ship-fever.⁸

Passenger safety posed another serious problem. The Immigration Service reported that steamships offered the steerage grossly insufficient or even no safety provisions. One investigator asserted,

The persons in charge of ocean going ships seem to have a strange antipathy to life-saving apparatus; and a belief that the ship alone should be trusted. It is argued that such apparatus would probably only prolong the misery of the persons escaping from the vessel
 . . .

A serious accident demonstrated the danger of this flippant attitude. When the Atlantic of the White Star Line ran aground, its steerage, on the lowest decks with insufficient access to the upper levels, rapidly filled and hundreds drowned.¹⁰

Passengers suffered not only from the dangers of the sea, but also from human capriciousness. U.S. failure to hold steamer officers and crew liable for their treatment of the steerage occupants enabled the sailors to act with impunity towards the immigrants. When the captain of the Charles H. Marshall died en route to America, the crew used its unexpected freedom to intimidate their

eighty Jewish passengers with "numerous indignities and brutal assaults and even to curtail their lawful rations of food and water." Although this incident occurred in unusual circumstances, in general for those two weeks at sea the ship's officers and crew held absolute power over their passengers. Not surprisingly, they often exploited this power to their economic advantage. Although many ships stocked wholesome food for the steerage, if the emigrants wanted these provisions, they found they had to buy them from the crew.¹¹

The Secretary of the Treasury had asked the Immigration Service inspectors to recommend changes to be made in the U.S. steerage legislation. The majority of the reports concluded that despite foreign regulatory law, the U.S. needed its own legislation to protect passengers landing on its shores.¹² European statutes regulated the physical accommodations offered the emigrants and the behavior of the crews on steamers sailing under their flags, but they varied from country to country. Moreover, even when immigrants knew that violations of a particular country's passenger laws had occurred during their voyage, they found it difficult to secure redress from American soil.¹³ Therefore, only a new American law effectively protecting the immigrants during their voyage from the types of abuses indicated above would force the steamship companies to furnish the steerage passengers the minimum accommodations necessary for a safe and healthy journey to America.

Immigration Service inspector Thomas Sanders reported that even if the Passenger Act of 1855 had applied to steamers, it still would

have been deficient in at least twenty-three areas. Enumerating these, he found among other complaints that the Passenger Act of 1855 failed to divide the steerage into individual compartments for men, women, and families or to require tables and benches for emigrant dining. This law permitted the transportation of cargo in the immigrant compartments and the carrying of explosive or combustible substances on board passenger ships. In addition, Sanders felt steerage should offer its occupants certain necessities (including hospitals, medical supplies, stewards, cooks, and life-saving apparatus) and that all ships should post laws informing passengers of their rights.¹⁴ Treasury Secretary Richardson particularly concurred with the recommendations of Sanders. In his letter to the Senate Richardson advised Congress to either greatly amend the Passenger Act of 1855 or better yet to create an entirely new piece of passenger legislation which would encompass the following: specification of the space allotted each immigrant on board ship; limitation of the decks on which passengers could be housed; minimal standards for the construction, partition, lighting, and cleaning of passenger decks, berths, stairways and hatches; arrangements for hospitals, closets, kitchens, and luggage space; staffing by cooks, stewards, and stewardesses; provisions for medical stores, food and water, ventilation, fire and lifesaving apparatus; a prohibition on carrying lunatics, criminals, idiots, diseased persons, or felons; a ban on transporting flammable or hazardous substances; rules regulating discipline on board,

fraternization between the crew and passengers, and relations between passengers of the opposite sex; and stipulations for posting abstracts of these laws on shipboard and for inspection by U.S. medical officers and government officials of each ship and its passengers to check compliance with U.S. law.¹⁵

Richardson sent his recommendations to the Senate on January 21, 1874. On August 2, 1882, an "Act to regulate the carriage of passengers by sea" became law. Eight years seems a long time to deliberate over one piece of legislation, especially when considering the urgency indicated by several of the Immigration Service inspectors and the fact that a few of their reports did contain drafts of proposed legislation for a new Passenger Act. What caused the delay? One of the inspectors believed that no major steerage legislation since 1855 suggested a fear that such laws would harm the emigrant trade and that some viewed such regulations as "unreasonably interfering with the profit of the capitalist."¹⁶ But why Congress, once alerted to the necessity for new passenger legislation, failed to act more quickly is unclear. The Congressional Record and Reports of the Committees of Commerce do not demonstrate that Congress feared that mandating improved steerage accommodations would stem the then welcome flow of immigrants, nor do they intimate that such legislation would unfairly impinge upon the free enterprise system. What is evident is that beginning in the early 1870's, both branches of Congress considered but failed to act on numerous

bills that would either have amended the existing Passenger Act or created an entirely new standard of legislation.¹⁷

Not until 1880 did the bill that ultimately became the Passenger Act of 1882 appear in the House. When recommending passage of this bill, the House Committee of Commerce indicated, as had the 1873 Immigration Service, that the legislation was of the utmost importance since U.S. federal courts had ruled the Passenger Act of 1855 not applicable to steamship steerage. Although the House of Representatives placed the bill on its calendar for consideration, the matter did not come to the floor in the 46th Congress. Finally, in the 47th Congress both Houses passed the bill.¹⁸ This time the President stymied the Congressional initiative by returning the bill to Congress without his signature. In an attached message President Chester A. Arthur cited objections to the language of certain sections of the bill which he felt might cause problems in the judicial interpretation of the law. He advised Congress to amend the bill in accordance with his suggestions after which he would be pleased to sign what he considered an important and necessary piece of legislation. The House promptly introduced an amended version of this bill. After all this time one Congressman now raised objections. He believed that not only did the steamship companies want this law, but that they had actually prepared the act for the U.S. government. The sponsor of the bill, Congressman Peter V. Deuster of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, set the record straight. He retorted that although steamship companies' representatives had

witnessed the hearings of the Committee of Commerce on the passenger bill, they had neither shaped nor even wanted this piece of legislation. Instead they had grudgingly acquiesced to the will of Congress and would no longer "fight the bill." Only on August 2, 1882, did the "Act to regulate the carriage of passengers by sea" receive Presidential approval.¹⁹

Congress had moved slowly in creating comprehensive new legislation designed to protect the steerage passenger. Although the steamship companies objected to Congressional efforts to legislate minimum steerage accommodations and perhaps contributed to the delay in the passage of the long considered Passenger Act, immigrants sailing to and from America after 1882 traveled under the protection of the U.S. Government. In fact, the Passenger Act of 1882 incorporated many, although not all, of the provisions that Secretary Richardson had recommended. This law regulated emigrant accommodations by specifying that no passenger travel on any deck lower than the first deck below the main one. It guaranteed each passenger a minimum of one hundred cubic feet of space and designated separate compartments for men, women, and families. It demanded that the passenger compartments be free of all cargo, and under its provisions the berths in these compartments, arranged in no more than two tiers, measured six feet by two feet. These apartments had to have adequate ventilation as well as covered hatchways and ladders or companion-ways with secure railings for access to the upper decks. Facilities offered the emigrants included a minimum of two water closets plus one separate W.C. for each one hundred

males and one extra W.C. for each fifty females, and two hospitals, one each for men and women, staffed with a surgeon supplied with instruments and medicines. The act called for adequate food and water and tables and benches for steerage dining. Congress held the ship's master responsible for all discipline and cleanliness and commanded him to prohibit the ship's company from visiting the steerage quarters except when required by their work responsibilities. No passenger ship could carry explosives as cargo or house any live-stock on or near a passenger deck. Finally, the act provided for inspection of the ship by a U.S. customs official who would report to the Secretary of Commerce and Labor. Violations of parts of the law were made misdemeanors punishable by fines and/or imprisonment. Although the final piece of legislation did not include all of Richardson's recommendations, the U.S. Immigration Commission, some twenty-five years later, still considered the Passenger Act of 1882 "an excellent measure."²⁰

One of Richardson's recommendations most glaringly absent in the Passenger Act of 1882 concerned the allocation of adequate lifesaving equipment for the steerage. Here, Congress apparently decided that rather than singling out safety precautions for the steerage, it would rely upon the proper enforcement of an earlier law which required that all steamers "be provided with such numbers of life-boats, floats, rafts, life-preservers, and drags as will best secure the safety of all persons on board such vessel in case of disaster." This bill left the determination of the exact amount

of this equipment up to the Board of Supervising Inspectors of Steam-Vessels, but it clearly covered the security of all those on board, making no distinction as to the comparative value of the lives of cabin passengers, crew or steerage. Although this Board of Supervising Inspectors did order all ships to carry one life preserver or float for each person on the ship, in 1905, Congress reinforced this policy by making failure to supply this minimum of safety apparatus for each person at sea a federal crime.²¹

While the Passenger Act of 1882 regulated the physical amenities of a journey in steamship steerage, this law was not the only piece of U.S. legislation that steamship companies had to heed when making arrangements for their steerage passengers. During the decades under consideration the United States government enacted a number of laws that standardized the process of immigration to provide for the immediate reception, care, and examination of potential immigrants and at the same time to exclude the most undesirable classes of aliens. Parenthetically, these acts obligated the steamship companies to comply with this U.S. immigration legislation and to bear a responsibility for their passengers that exceeded simply providing the physical accommodations of a steamship voyage.

Starting with the Immigration Act of 1882, the U.S. government began restricting the classes of aliens which it permitted to land. It soon became apparent that steamship companies would therefore have to exercise some caution and screen their immigrant passengers in order to make certain that they were admissible under U.S. law.

Legislation in the 1880's had stipulated that America did not welcome the immigration of idiots, lunatics, persons likely to become a public charge, convicts, or contract-laborers. A more comprehensive act in 1891 banned

all idiots, insane persons, paupers or persons likely to become a public charge, persons suffering from a loathsome or dangerous contagious disease, persons who have been convicted of a felony or other infamous crime or misdemeanor involving moral turpitude, (and) polygamists . . .

Subsequent legislation in 1903 and 1907 refined and expanded these categories of excluded persons. Moreover, the Immigration Act of 1891 threatened with deportation any person whose ticket or passage was paid in whole or part by another, unless such assistance had come directly from a close friend or relative. The 1891 law also ordered any person who became a public charge within one year after landing in the U.S. returned to Europe at the expense of the transportation company that had originally carried the emigrant.²²

Congress had anticipated that the steamship companies would in all likelihood not comply with these immigration restrictions unless prompted by financial considerations. Therefore, this legislation ordered the transportation companies to pay for the lodging of any passengers detained for further examination at one of the U.S. immigrant reception stations. The steamship lines also had to absorb the costs of the return voyages for those immigrants ultimately rejected from admission to the U.S. Finding that even this was not sufficient to deter the steamship companies from bringing unsuitable aliens to America, in 1893, Congress commanded the

steamship lines to make an inspection of all immigrants prior to embarkation in order to ascertain whether or not each steerage passenger met U.S. immigration requirements. Both the ship's master (or another senior officer) and a qualified surgeon had to sign the ship's manifest in the presence of an American consul, swearing that they had examined all immigrants on board and that none of them violated any of the U.S. immigration laws with respect to their health, character, or economic arrangements. In 1903, Congress made an effort to place more of an economic burden on transportation companies noted for the laxity of their physical inspections. The 1903 Immigration Law made it unlawful for any carrier to bring in an immigrant "afflicted with a loathsome or dangerous disease," if it appeared "that the existence of such a disease might have been detected by means of a competent medical examination . . . at the time of foreign embarkation." Each violation of this provision carried a one hundred dollar fine.²³

Not only were the steamship companies ultimately responsible for making sure that they did not carry objectionable immigrants to the U.S., but federal legislation also restricted the manner in which the agents of these corporations recruited their prospective customers. As noted above, federal law did not permit immigrants to land who had received assistance in paying for their passage, unless such money came from close friends or relatives. But U.S. law also prohibited the agents of these steamship companies from soliciting, inviting, or encouraging the immigration of any alien and asserted

that advertisements for these lines could state only "the sailings of their vessels and the terms and facilities of transportation therein." Moreover, to guarantee at the outset that immigrants coming to America knew whether or not they were making a futile journey, all emigration agents had to post conspicuously in their places of business copies of the American immigration laws printed in the language of the local country.²⁴

In order to make certain that U.S. officials had an accurate record of all immigrants landed, ship's officers had to furnish detailed manifests of all immigrants which included not only information on each passenger, the compartment occupied during the voyage, the number of pieces of luggage, and explanation of any deaths occurring on board, but also pertinent facts describing each immigrant's nationality, occupation, literacy, and final destination. Anyone not accurately entered on these manifests risked deportation back to Europe. In 1903 Congress required that manifests list all alien passengers on board, so that those who could afford to emigrate in the first or second cabin rather than in the steerage had to undergo as well the immigration inspection upon landing. Finally, the U.S. government held the owners, officers, and agents of the transportation companies responsible for "adopting due precautions" to insure that all immigrants listed on the manifests landed in accordance with U.S. law.²⁵

Although during the period of massive immigration the Passenger Act of 1882 remained in force, Congress amended the law twice. An

amendment in 1905, specified in greater detail the information required on all ships' manifests. Of greater importance to the steerage travelers, however, was the amendment of February 20, 1907, designed to increase the passenger air space.²⁶ The necessity for an amendment to the Passenger Act of 1882 became apparent even in the first decade of its enforcement, for despite the new legislation, it became increasingly clear that steamship steerages still often endangered the health and safety of their passengers.

One indication of problems with the Passenger Act appeared in the decisions of the federal courts in cases citing violations of the law. These cases indicated that steamship steerages in many instances flagrantly ignored U.S. passenger law. Complaints charged that ships were still overcrowded, that passengers "suffered hunger and want, thirst and starvation" and had to use improperly constructed, "disgustingly filthy" water closets; and that stewards and cooks had "an interest in creating and supplying a demand for extras and delicacies, and even necessities among the said passengers." Yet federal courts, in interpreting the language of the law, found that they could not always furnish relief for abused passengers. For example, in one case where the emigrants sued to recover damages for a ship's failure to serve three meals daily or to provide tables and seats for steerage dining, the court ruled that although the Passenger Act of 1882 mandated such items and although the ship could be fined for not supplying these provisions, the passengers themselves could not collect any penalties from the ship's master

under the 1882 law. Passengers could sue for civil damages for breach of contract if the shipping company failed to provide services or facilities stipulated in their original tickets of passage.²⁷ However, presumably few poor immigrants had the financial resources or the legal knowledge to take such independent actions.

Another important decision in the construction of this law occurred in 1889. In this case the court found that it did not have the immediate authority to assess fines for non-compliance with major provisions of the 1882 law. The penalty provisions concluding five of the thirteen sections of the 1882 legislation stipulated that violations of these sections constituted misdemeanors which carried maximum fines. In 1889, a federal circuit court ruled that in order "to determine whether or not the master owes a fine for a misdemeanor, there must be a criminal prosecution wherein the accused may have the verdict of a jury." Because no criminal prosecution had taken place, the court dismissed the libel. Since the burden of evidence in a criminal proceeding is more exacting than in a civil case and since criminal issues are more complex in requiring indictments and jury trials, it is to be presumed that this ruling adversely affected the outcome of other cases brought under the Passenger Act of 1882.²⁸ Thus, judicial interpretation quickly demonstrated definite weaknesses in the construction of the Act.

Others besides the judiciary demonstrated sensitivity to deficiencies in the 1882 steerage legislation. In 1886, a committee of the American Medical Association (AMA) wrote to Congress

"praying for legislation to protect the lives of emigrants at sea." This committee had been led to believe that the Passenger Act of 1882 had corrected many of the evils which had endangered lives on board emigrant ships. But new evidence in the Journal of the American Medical Association had contradicted this impression. The ship's surgeon on the Guion Atlantic's Arizona had written to the Journal, complaining that only a thin partition, useless against contagious diseases, separated two of the ship's four hospitals, from the permanent steerage. And the other two, located in the ship's bow, were half under water eight months of the year. Ventilation in the Arizona's steerage was so poor that the passengers had filed a written complaint with the ship's captain. Actions by the surgeon to improve these conditions had resulted in his dismissal. ²⁹

After carefully studying the issue of passenger health, the AMA committee concluded that the "deadly artificial climate of this class of passenger vessels and the criminal negligence of those who transport emigrants to the U.S." caused excessive emigrant mortality on board and at the same time endangered the U.S. population by increasing the risk of landing immigrants who might spread epidemics. The committee reported that emigrant ships offered the steerage notoriously "incompetent medical service and the want of proper sanitary care." Only an urgent amendment to the Passenger Act of 1882 requiring an additional surgeon, if there were more than six hundred passengers on board, who would make daily inspections of all

passenger areas, and supervise the distribution of food and water would remedy this disastrous situation.³⁰

Despite the observed deficiencies in the Passenger Act of 1882, a significant amendment to the law materialized only in February, 1907, as part of a major new Immigration Act. Section 42 of this legislation amended section 1 of the Passenger Act of 1882 to provide for increased air space for the steerage travelers. The U.S. Government delayed enforcing section 42 until January 1, 1909, in order to provide sufficient time for the transportation companies to refurbish their steamships to comply with the physical standards set by the new law. However, section 42 never did become operative, for Congress repealed the law in December, 1908, in favor of another amendment to the Passenger Act of 1882.

Section 42 of the Immigration Act of 1907 originated with a Conference Committee appointed to solve the differences between the two Houses of Congress over a new immigration bill (S. 4403). At the end of 1906, both the Secretary of Commerce and Labor and the Commissioner of Navigation recommended in their annual reports that Congress greatly revise the 1882 Passenger Act. Whereas in the past the Commissioner had found the Passenger Act satisfactory, he now called for an overhaul of the law. He argued that contemporary steamship technology had rendered parts of the Passenger Act obsolete. Thanks to the use of steel, modern commercial ships were huge structures of six to ten decks capable of carrying thousands of passengers. The 1882 Passenger Act, designed before such large

vessels commonly appeared on the seas, required significant modification to meet the standards of twentieth century ships. Furthermore, the Commissioner added that "steerage accommodations of many ocean steamships exceeded statutory requirements, and standards voluntarily established by some may properly be made obligatory upon others."³¹ The Conference Committee on S. 4403, apparently aware of the need for an amendment to the Passenger Act of 1882, had actually overstepped its powers by adding an entirely new section (42) to the Immigration Act of February, 1907, to increase the air space allocated the steerage passengers. In its consideration of section 42 Congress had questioned neither the construction nor the conformity of this amendment to the latest steamship technology.³² In this case it shortly became apparent that haste had made waste, for within a year Congress was once again debating another piece of legislation designed to repeal section 42 and to amend anew section 1 of the 1882 Passenger Act.

In January, 1908, a full year before section 42 would become effective, the U.S. Immigration Commission held hearings on the merits of this part of the 1907 Immigration Act. The shipping companies had requested these hearings, for

As soon as that section was brought to the attention of the steamship companies, they realized that it would be greatly to their disadvantage and felt that the section had probably been agreed upon by the conferees and passed by the Congress under a misapprehension of the facts of the case.³³

At these hearings a spokesman for the shipping interests, P.A.S. Franklin, enumerated the major weaknesses of section 42.

One of the most important problems with section 42 was its failure to conform to the regulations governing passenger air space established by the British Board of Trade in 1908. The shipping interests considered these British ordinances far superior in content and structure to the specifications prescribed by section 42. While the American law permitted the carrying of steerage passengers only on the main deck and the next two decks below that, the British regulations permitted steerage passengers to be carried "on any deck not more than one deck below the water line." Section 42 prevented ships conveying only steerage passengers from lodging emigrants on the upper levels, usually reserved on other vessels for the cabin passengers. Secondly, section 42 employed the antiquated term "main deck." With modern steamships having seven, eight, or nine levels, experts could rarely agree as to which deck of a ship constituted the main one. If section 42 stood as passed, designating permissible steerage passenger decks in relationship to the main one, U.S. Immigration officials would have difficulty enforcing this law. Furthermore, in allocating steerage passenger space, section 42 had failed to take into account that in the past eight or nine years several steamship lines had introduced a variety of public rooms for the comfort of their steerage passengers. These dining rooms and smoking and women's lounges afforded the emigrants alternatives to pacing the open decks or sitting in their berths. But should section 42 become effective, these amenities would vanish. Since section 42 required that each passenger have a minimum of

eighteen square feet for his or her personal use, Franklin believed that steamers would now have to allocate all their steerage spaces to individual accommodations, for no steamship could afford to carry one passenger for every eighteen square feet of steerage deck space and to provide public rooms for the emigrants.³⁴

And herein lay the crux of the issue. Section 42 would make steamship steerage a far less profitable business. The 1907 Immigration Act would reduce the number of passengers a ship could carry by as much as 35 per cent, for it raised the legal minimum space required per passenger from about fourteen square feet under the 1882 Passenger Act to eighteen square feet. This improvement would cut the passenger capacity of, for example, the Hamburg-American's Amerika from 2,398 to 1,659. But Franklin pointed out that the 1908 British Board of Trade regulations, enacted after a careful study of steerage conditions, found that fifteen square feet of unshared, personal space sufficed for emigrant passengers. Not only had the British ordinances made a much less severe cut in the passenger carrying capacity of the steamships, but these new rules encouraged steerages to provide public rooms for the emigrants. For a steamer could reduce the emigrants' individual sleeping accommodations to twelve square feet, if the ship converted the extra three square feet of space into "public rooms, lavatories, and bathrooms exclusively appropriated to the use of the steerage passengers." In this way steamship lines could continue to offer their steerage passengers those comforts which Franklin claimed were necessary to secure a

competitive edge, without reducing the number of passengers carried. Shortly after the conclusion of these hearings, one of the members of the Immigration Commission, Senator Henry Cabot Lodge of Massachusetts, introduced bill S. 5083 similar to the British Board of Trade regulations, designed to repeal section 42 and to amend anew section 1 of the Passenger Act of 1882.³⁵

In its endorsement of S. 5083, the Senate's Committee on Immigration cited the support of the Commissioner of Navigation E.T. Chamberlain. His report had coincidentally noted exactly the same problems with section 42 as Franklin had found. In arguing the case for S. 5083 Chamberlain carefully pointed out to the Committee that the bill would still reduce the steerage carrying capacity of ships coming directly from Hamburg and Bremen by about 15 per cent. Yet, its passage would affirm the principle of international uniformity of shipping laws.³⁶

Subsequently, the House Committee on Immigration and Naturalization questioned Chamberlain about his support of S. 5083. At these hearings Chamberlain claimed that even at the time of its passage Congress had perceived section 42 to be imperfect, and for that very reason

The date of its enforcement was postponed for about a year and half, so that there would be chance to reconsider the matter.³⁷

In its report on S. 5083, the House Committee amended the bill to increase the space allocated each passenger to the levels originally proposed by section 42. But a ship could reduce this minimum space

of eighteen square feet per passenger by three square feet, provided that the extra space was turned into the kinds of public rooms, lavatories, and bathrooms the British regulations had encouraged. The House Committee's amendment had been prompted in part by the report of Ellis Island's Commissioner Robert Watchorn who had observed that during 1908, 1,506 children landing at his station suffered from "diseases due more or less to overcrowding and insanitary conditions." Yet, these children had traveled on vessels that conformed to the British orders, the same regulations that S. 5083, as passed by the Senate, called for. Consequently, when it considered the bill, the House Committee amended S. 5083 to incorporate the best provisions of section 42, namely the large amount of requisite passenger space, with the best provisions of the Board of Trade regulations permitting part of such space to be allocated to provide for public rooms for the steerage passengers.³⁸

On December 19, 1908, Congress repealed section 42 and passed a version of S. 5083 similar to that drafted by the House.³⁹

The passage of this law clearly reflected Congress' determination to correct the "brutal and even murderous conditions" under which many immigrants traveled to America, even in the face of the organized steamship concerns' argument that granting such space to the emigrants would seriously hurt their profit margin. Congress recognized that

The steamship companies will conform rather than lose the price of the passage of the immigrant, but it is a question of forcing these heartless corporations to have greater care for the lives of those who cannot protect themselves against their greed.⁴⁰

The amendment of December 19, 1908, was the last successful Congressional attempt to legislate improved steerage conditions prior to World War I.⁴¹

Although Congress had often moved slowly in its considerations of passenger legislation, it had shown a determined and consistent concern for the welfare of the immigrants landing on its shores. Congress maintained that the United States government had the right, authority, and moral obligation to insure that those travelers bound for America had a safe and healthy voyage across the ocean. Thus in 1882, Congress, unwittingly anticipating the coming flood of the "new immigration," had created the Passenger Act designed to erase some of the worst evils associated with the Atlantic crossing in steamship steerage. Subsequent U.S. immigration legislation had its impact upon the journeying emigrants as well. For as the U.S. government began to restrict the classes of persons permitted to land on its shores, it made the steamship companies responsible for inspection of these would-be emigrants on the European side. Only in the first decade of the twentieth century, however, did the U.S. government again re-evaluate its basic passenger legislation. Finding that improved steamship technology and competitiveness for the lucrative steerage trade had stimulated new steamships to add amenities such as lounging and wash rooms heretofore unknown in the steerage, Congress acted to revise its 1882 law. The final amendment to the Passenger Act of 1882 corrected the problem, still present in 1908, of overcrowded steerages and at the same time

encouraged steamships to make these improved facilities standard on all steerage passenger ships en route to the United States. The history of U.S. steerage legislation, therefore, shows Congressional determination to keep pace with the most recent steamship technological improvements to insure, as far as possible, that those bound for these shores enjoyed a safe and healthy journey to America by steam.

NOTES

- 1 Passenger Act of 1855, chapter 213, 10 United States Statutes at Large 715; U.S., 61st Congress, 3rd session, 1910-11. Senate Document 758 (Congressional Serial Set volume 5879): Reports of the Immigration Commission on Immigration Legislation, p. 359.
- 2 U.S., 43rd Cong., 1st sess., 1874. Senate Executive Document 23 (serial 1580): Steerage Passengers on Emigrant Vessels, pp. 12, 68.
- 3 U.S. v. Manhattan, 16 Federal Cases 596 (Southern District New York, 1868), affirmed, 26 F.Cas. 1150 (Circuit Court, S.D.N.Y. 1868); Sen. Exec. Doc. 23 (serial 1580): pp. 1, 70-71; Sen. Doc. 758 (serial 5879): pp. 360-61.
- 4 Sen. Exec. Doc. 23 (serial 1580): pp. 12, 21, 55, 69; For reports of grossly overcrowded steerages, see U.S., 47th Cong., 1st sess., 18 April 1882. Congressional Record 13(3): 3013-17.
- 5 Sen. Doc. 758 (serial 5879): pp. 363.
- 6 Sen. Exec. Doc. 23 (serial 1580): pp. 13, 26; Maldwyn Allen Jones in American Immigration (Chicago, 1960, p. 185), wrote
- As early as 1873 a Congressional investigation of the immigrant trade could find no serious abuses; the general opinion of the investigators was rather that the cruelty, ill usage, and general discomfort of the steerage belong to the history of the past.

While Dr. John M. Woodworth of the U.S. Marine Hospital Service did write, "that much of the cruelty. . ." (Sen. Exec. Doc. 23 (serial 1580): 12, my emphasis), this optimistic appraisal was by no means shared among all the members of the 1873 Immigration Service. Clearly, no one contested the fact that steamship steerage greatly improved upon immigration in a sailing packet, but in the steamships much unnecessary "cruelty, ill usage, and general discomfort" were still the general rule of thumb. What

progress had occurred stemmed primarily from, as Jones correctly notes, the tremendous reduction in transatlantic sailing time, so that the immigrants endured the steerage not for one to three months, but rather for ten days to two weeks, reaping the healthful benefits of the much shorter voyage.

7 Sen. Exec. Doc. 23 (serial 1580): pp. 59-60.

8 See the Congressional debates on House of Representatives bill H.R. 2744. U.S., 47th Cong., 1st sess. 18 April 1882. Cong. Rec. 13(3):3012-3023; Sen. Exec. Doc. 23 (serial 1580): pp. 24, 62, 65; Sen. Doc. 758 (serial 5879): p. 368.

9 Sen. Exec. Doc. 23 (serial 1580): p. 59.

10 Sen. Exec. Doc. 23 (serial 1580): p. 62.

11 Sen. Exec. Doc. 23 (serial 1580): pp. 63, 57.

12 Sen. Exec. Doc. 23 (serial 1580): pp. 30-36, 81-106, 197.

13 18 April 1882. Cong. Rec. 13(3):3019; See also, Thomas W. Page, "The Transportation of Immigrants and Reception Arrangements in the Nineteenth Century," Journal of Political Economy, 19 (1911), 742-43.

14 Sen. Exec. Doc. 23 (serial 1580): pp. 81-82.

15 Sen. Exec. Doc. 23 (serial 1580): pp. 1-2; An investigation of emigrant ships sailing from Liverpool, made in 1872 by the Sanitary Commission of The Lancet, a British medical journal, reached similar conclusions to those of the 1873 U.S. Immigration Service. The Lancet Sanitary Commission concluded that while steamship steerage had greatly improved upon the "middle passage" of the sailing vessels, a number of changes were still "imperatively needed" to apply the best conditions available on some steamships to all. This Sanitary Commission called for all steerages to offer clearly separated compartments, improved ventilation, lavatories, hospitals, and stewardesses. The Lancet Sanitary Commission, "Reports on Emigrant Ships," The Lancet, 1872, vol. 2, pp. 492-93, 530, 564-65, 616-17, 643-44. For The Lancet's reaction to the Immigration Service reports, see The Lancet, 1874, vol. 1, p. 383.

- 16 Sen. Exec. Doc. 23 (serial 1580): p. 67.
- 17 See among others: U.S., 42nd Cong., 3rd sess., 11 Dec. 1872. Congressional Globe 1872-73 (1):126, H.R. 2186, a bill to amend the Passenger Act of 1855; U.S., 43rd Cong., 2nd sess., 25 Jan. 1875. Cong. Rec. 3(1):680, Senate bill 1188 introduced to amend the Passenger Act of 1855; U.S. 44th Cong., 1st sess. 24 Jan. 1876. Cong. Rec. 4(1):586. H.R. 1380 introduced to protect life on steamships, steamboats and sailing vessels, Reported adversely from committee. 11 April 1876. Cong. Rec. 4(3):2379; U.S., 45th Cong., 1st sess., 12 Nov. 1877. Cong. Rec. 6(6):341, S. 249 introduced to amend certain sections of U.S. laws re steam-vessels, commerce, and navigation.
- 18 U.S., 46th Cong., 2nd sess., 8 Apr. 1880. Cong. Rec. 10(3):2243, H.R. 5705 on the carriage of passengers by sea; U.S., 46th Cong., 2nd sess., 1880. H.R. 1567 (serial 1938): Report of the Committee of Commerce on Carriage of Passengers by Sea; U.S., 46th Cong., 2nd sess., 21 May 1880. Cong. Rec. 10(4):3636; U.S., 47th Cong., 1st sess., 30 Jan. 1882. Cong. Rec. 13(1):739, H.R. 2744 to regulate the carriage of passengers by sea.
- 19 U.S., 47th Cong., 1st sess., 1882. House Executive Document 227 (serial 2031): Message of the President on the Carriage of Passengers by Sea. U.S., 47th Cong., 1st sess., 7 July 1882. Cong. Rec. 12(6):5752, 22 July 1882. Cong. Rec. 13(6):6367-68, 4 Aug. 1882. Cong. Rec. 13(7):6904.
- 20 Passenger Act of 1882, ch. 374, 22 Stat. 186; Sen. Doc. 758 (serial 5879):368.
- 21 An Act to provide for the better security of life on board steam-vessels, ch. 100, sec. 52, 16 Stat. 440 (1871); U.S., 50th Cong., 1st sess., 1888. H. Exec. Doc. 139 (serial 2558): Life-Boats on Passenger Steamers; An Act to amend section 4488 et al of the Revised Statutes re Steamboat Inspection Service, ch. 1454, 33 Stat. (1):1023 (1905).
- 22 Immigration Act of 1882, ch. 376, sec. 2, 22 Stat. 214; Contract Labor Law of 1885, ch. 164, 23 Stat. 332; Immigration Act of 1891, ch. 551, sec. 1, 26 Stat. 1084; Immigration Act of 1903, ch. 1012, sec. 2, 32 Stat. (1):1213; Immigration Act of 1907, ch. 1134, sec. 2, 34 Stat. (1):898; Sec. 11, 26 Stat. 1084 (1891); In 1903, this time limitation was raised to within two years of the date of original landing, sec. 20, 32 Stat. 1213; In 1907, to within three years of date of original landing, sec. 20, 34 Stat. 898.

- 23 Sec. 4, 22 Stat. 214 (1882); Immigration Act of 1893, ch. 206, secs. 2, 3, 27 Stat. 569; Sec. 9, 32 Stat. 1213 (1903).
- 24 Supra., p. 25; Sec. 4, 26 Stat. 1084 (1981); Sec. 8, 27 Stat. 569 (1893).
- 25 An Act to amend section 9 of the Passenger Act of 1882, concerning lists of passengers, ch. 564, 33 Stat. 711 (1905); Secs. 1, 4, 27 Stat. 569 (1893); Secs. 12, 18, 32 Stat. 1213 (1903).
- 26 Supra., p. 27; An Act to amend sec. 1 of the Passenger Act of 1882, ch. 6, 35 Stat. 583 (1908).
- 27 39 Federal Reporter 429. The Scotia (D.C., E. D. N.Y. 1889); 23 Fed. Rep. 906. Bellicini et al v. The Prinz George (C.C., E. D. Louis. 1884); 45 Fed. Rep. 764. O'Carroll et al v. the Havre (C.C., E. D. Louis. 1891).
- 28 38 Fed. Rep. 440. U.S. v. The Sidonian (C.C., E. D. Louis. 1889); See also 50 Fed. Rep. 605. U.S. v. The Nellie May (D.C., D. Rhode Island. 1892).
- 29 U.S., 50th Cong., 1st sess., 1886. Senate Miscellaneous Document 57 (serial 2516): Memorial of the American Medical Association praying for legislation to protect the lives of emigrants at sea; "Reports from Abroad," The Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA), 7, (11 Sept. 1886), pp. 306-07.
- 30 Sen. Misc. Doc. 57 (serial 2516): In his article, "An Inquiry into the Mortality Among Passengers," (JAMA, 9, 29 Oct. 1887), pp. 557-58), S. T. Armstrong had cited the following statistics for deaths among steerage passengers.

<u>Year</u>	<u>No. of steerage passengers landing in the U.S.</u>	<u>Deaths</u>
1882	747,573	149
1883	594,378	115
1884	524,931	108
1885	428,647	72
1886	334,613	70

Although upon first glance, the numbers of deaths per steerage passengers seem quite small, Armstrong did not agree. He claimed that these numbers failed to include mortality statistics for children under eight years of age, that embarking steerage

passengers were generally in the prime of life and would not undertake the journey if they were ill, and that these records omitted any account of those who had become ill on board, but who had died after landing in the U.S. Armstrong concluded that especially when considering the short duration of the journey, these shipboard mortality figures were unnecessarily high.

- 31 U.S., Department of Commerce and Labor, Bureau of Navigation, Annual Report of the Commissioner of Navigation, 1903, Doc. No. 4, pp. 54-55; 1905, Doc. No. 48, p. 24; U.S., Department of Commerce and Labor, Reports of the Department of Commerce and Labor, 1906, pp. 40, 472-75.
- 32 U.S., 59th Cong., 2nd sess., 1907. House Report 7607 (serial 5065): Conference Report on Regulating Immigration of Aliens into U.S.; 13 February 1907. Cong. Rec. 41(3):2810; 16 Feb. 1907. Cong. Rec. 41(4): 3088-92; 18 Feb. 1907. Cong. Rec. 41(4): 3216, 3222; sec. 42, 34 Stat. 898 (1907).
- 33 Sen. Doc. 758 (serial 5879): p. 413.
- 34 Sen. Doc. 758 (serial 5879): pp. 413-14, 449.
- 35 Sen. Doc. 758 (serial 5879): pp. 413-17, 443, 424-25; U.S., 60th Cong., 1st sess., 6 Feb. 1908. Cong. Rec. 42(2):1665.
- 36 U.S., 60th Cong., 1st sess., 1908. Senate Report 245 (serial 5218): Report of the Committee on Immigration on amending sec. 1 of the Passenger Act of 1882, pp. 2, 7; Sen. Doc. 758 (serial 5879): p. 443.
- 37 Sen. Doc. 758 (serial 5879): p. 441; When asked why he now preferred S. 5083 when section 42 had been adopted under his suggestion, Chamberlain became indignant: "I beg your pardon, gentlemen; you are familiar with the circumstances of the draft of the section." Then the Committee went off the record, returning only "after an informal discussion" had ensued. Sen. Doc. 758 (serial 5879): p. 443.
- 38 U.S., 60th Cong., 1st sess., 1908. H. Rep. 1566 (serial 5226): Report of the Committee on Immigration and Naturalization on amending sec. 1 of the Passenger Act of 1882, pp. 1-4; Sen. Doc. 758 (serial 5879): 451.

- 39 An Act to amend section 1 of the Passenger Act of 1882, ch. 6, 35 Stat. (1):583 (1908).
- 40 Sen. Doc. 758 (serial 5879): pp. 450-51.
- 41 Other bills were introduced to amend the Passenger Act of 1882, but they were not seriously considered. See U.S., 62nd Cong., 2nd sess., 8 Dec. 1911. Cong. Rec. 48 (1):135, and U.S., 63rd Cong., 1st sess., 10 June 1913. Cong. Rec. 50(2):1985.

Chapter II

From Shtetl to Border: The Agents

"Off to America!" These deceptively simple words belie the numerous obstacles of the lengthy and often most difficult journey that nearly every emigrant had to face. The determined travelers, after purchasing tickets if relatives already in America had not forwarded them, faced an overwhelming number of decisions. Which route to take? Whether or not to buy a passport? How much baggage to carry? For answers to these and an array of other questions about the journey, the heretofore untraveled emigrants depended upon the assistance of "agents" experienced in the task of conveying emigrants from shtetl to border.

Nearly every one of the more than two million East European Jews migrating in the years 1868-1914 had to deal with one of these agents. But these agents held especial importance for those Jews emigrating from Russia. Lacking the benefit of any imperial protective legislation and caught within the conflicting web of Russian policy on emigration, the Russian Jews had to rely upon the agents to arrange everything from obtaining a passport to stealing across the border. This influence enabled the agents to exploit the emigrants. While the vast majority of the Russian Jews ultimately reached their destinations, many of them landed somewhat unnecessarily poorer for their journey. The 1907 U.S. Immigration Commission recognized this when it concluded that from the time the

foreigner determines to emigrate, "he is exploited extensively and by varied means by most of those with whom he comes in contact, and particularly by agents (and) sub-agents..."¹

Under the rubric agents, the emigrants lumped together all those who played any role in settling their transportation arrangements. But the local agents, with whom the emigrants dealt in their homes, were more correctly termed sub-agents. Also known variously as runners, herders, promoters, and solicitors, these sub-agents acquired extreme importance both for the steamship companies and for the emigrants. The sub-agents, scattered throughout every small town and village of eastern and southern Europe, made the initial contacts with potential emigrants for the steamship companies. Even the President of the United States recognized the importance of these agents who could "wheedle and cajole many immigrants" into uprooting themselves and their families and setting off for America. The steamship lines counted upon the sub-agents to supply the huge numbers of emigrant passengers needed to fill their great steerage holds. For their endeavors the sub-agents received commissions on each ticket sold, usually the equivalent of one and one-half or two American dollars, which they collected directly from the emigrants as deposits for the steerage passage. But even for emigrants who traveled on prepaids -- tickets purchased on an installment plan by relatives living in America -- dealing with the sub-agents still proved unavoidable.²

In a report published by the Russian Department of Justice in 1905 S. Ya. Yanovsky described the critical role these local agents played for the emigrants.

The emigrating mass consists mostly of ignorant peasants and burghers. They are unable to accomplish their purpose unassisted. The vast majority among them have never before left their village or borough, and now they have to undertake a journey over thousands of miles of land and sea, carrying with themselves all their belongings, and frequently accompanied by wife and children. How is it to be done? How shall they reach the port of embarkation? How much will the journey cost? What is to be done with the luggage; what shall they leave and what take along? How shall they obtain a passport? These and a number of other questions are in the majority of cases beyond the intelligence and experience of the emigrant, and to meet the demand a numerous class of middlemen -- "agents" -- sprang into existence.

The complexity of the land arrangements necessary for the East European Jewish emigration augmented the importance of these local sub-agents. The majority of the East European Jews did not sail from native harbors. Instead, since most of them boarded ships in either German or English ports, these emigrants had to cross any of a number of foreign countries en route to America. They came, therefore, to rely upon local experts in emigration, the sub-agents, to help them make arrangements for this stage of their journey. These sub-agents not only sold the emigrants steamship passages, but they also assisted the travelers in obtaining passports, or alternatively, where emigration was illegal, in stealing across the border. These activities made the sub-agents indispensable for the emigrating masses, and unfortunately all too often put the emigrants at the mercy of these frequently less than scrupulous men. ⁴

Within Russia sub-agents fell into two general categories, those permitted by the Russian government to sell tickets to points abroad and those operating illegally. While imperial law technically forbade emigration from Russia, since the government did allow limited travel abroad, some ticketing agencies could legally conduct business from within the Empire. In the 1880's, several merchants at the Baltic port of Libau began selling passage to America via English and German lines. Regulated by Russian brokerage law, these ticketing bureaus had to post bonds and to register with the government prior to opening their offices. Subsequently, a few agents in the southern and western parts of Russia affiliated with the licensed Libau firms as branch offices, so that they too could legitimately sell steamship tickets to America. ⁵

The Russian brokerage law, however, unlike the 1897 "German Imperial Law on Emigrant Affairs," neglected to require that all agents demonstrate their business reliability prior to opening an office. Therefore, as Yanovsky noted, "this 'legalization' was absolutely insufficient to bring order into the business." Not only did the Russian government fail to investigate the moral qualifications of the few authorized steamship agents, but the vast majority of the sub-agents operating within the Empire did so illegally, having no affiliation with any brokerage firm bonded in Russia. These sub-agents, representing foreign steamship companies such as Germany's Hamburg-American and North German Lloyd Lines, arranged the emigrants' passage in direct violation of the imperial law

prohibiting instigation of emigration. ⁶

Since the era of sailing vessels the major shipping concerns of western Europe had subcontracted with independent agents to handle the jobs of contacting the emigrants in their homes and booking their overseas passage. Because of the uncertainty that came from never knowing whether or not independent agents were booking passengers on their lines, after 1850, the German companies devised a system whereby each shipping company directed its passenger business through a single brokerage firm. In the era when steamships switched from commodity transport to passenger transport, the German lines profited from their exclusive relationship with a single booking firm. Shortly thereafter the British Cunard and White Star Lines adopted the same pattern. Emigrants soon became very familiar with the names of these ticketing agencies. In fact, F. Missler, the exclusive broker for North German Lloyd's steerage, permitted his sub-agents to distribute literature bearing his name and photograph but not those of the line which he represented. ⁷

These ticketing concerns employed huge numbers of sub-agents. In 1891, U.S. Immigration Commissioners investigating European emigration estimated that seven thousand agents and sub-agents operated throughout the continent, but that this figure did not include those working for the giant Hamburg-American and North German Lloyd Lines. Although the passenger brokerage firms had general agents in the major emigration centers, for much of their business they relied upon local people to make personal contacts with the

emigrants in their homes. It proves, however, impossible to make any formal accounting of these sub-agents since local runners were neither licensed nor bonded. Furthermore, since these sub-agents operated illegally in Russia, they were frequently arrested, thus forcing the European shipping companies to search constantly for new runners. Working solely on a commission basis, these sub-agents cost the brokerage firms nothing if they booked no tickets. Therefore, agencies like F. Missler actively recruited local herdors in an effort to spread a network of its sub-agents across eastern and southern Europe. In its advertisements Missler offered teachers, postmasters, rabbis, priests, or local officials -- in other words anyone literate who could write receipts for deposits -- the opportunity to earn fees for helping their countrymen emigrate. ³

While many of these sub-agents handled by themselves all of the arrangements for their transmigrants, others expanded their operations by dealing with numerous "unofficial agents." These unofficial agents" differed from the sub-agents illegally selling steamship passages from within Russia, in that they boasted no legitimate affiliation to any transportation concern. Rather they performed a number of ancillary tasks for the ticket selling sub-agents. They drummed up business, receiving small commissions from the sub-agent for each emigrant they guided to him. Others earned fees by offering weekly classes for the unskilled travelers in emigration. Topics covered in these "courses," offered by rabbis, teachers, and county notaries included how to carry money, answer questions, and

conceal diseases. Others handled the jobs of procuring passports for the emigrants, or alternatively, of guiding them across the Russian frontier without one. Here preying upon the emigrants' inexperience and fears, former horse dealers, coachmen, boarding house keepers, money exchangers, liquor sellers and adventurers, in other words, anyone who came into contact with potential immigrants, operated. ⁹

With all kinds of people arranging their transportation, it is not surprising that the East European Jewish emigrants frequently complained that they suffered abuse at the hands of these "agents." Fraud, extortion, and even physical violence proved not uncommon experiences. When emigrants complained about unscrupulous agents, they found, however, that they could expect no redress for their grievances from the European shipping companies; this pyramid system of agents produced a curious chain of negation of responsibility. At the very bottom the unofficial agents carried on their activities independent of any restraints, except those imposed by the fact that in assisting emigration they violated Russian law. Just above them thousands of sub-agents, loosely affiliated with the ticketing firms of the European shipping lines, sold the emigrants steerage passage. Yet, both the shipping lines and their booking firms admitted that they exercised virtually no control over the activities of these local sub-agents. ¹⁰

The shipping companies denied responsibility for the salesmen for they considered them employees of the ticketing firms. And the

ticketing concerns readily admitted that they could not check the activities of these local middlemen. Whereas booking firms could fine or dismiss bonded district agents who recruited emigrants in violation of local or U.S. immigration laws, and did in fact fine such people, they could take no action against their unlicensed sub-agents illegally selling passage from within the Russian Empire. They instructed these promoters not to book emigrants likely to be considered unfit for immigration by American authorities and warned that the sub-agents would bear the transportation costs for any immigrants turned back at Ellis Island. But the threat of this punishment did little to curb the activities of the sub-agents, for the expense involved in the return of a rejected immigrant was comparatively small. ¹¹

The European booking firms' control over the Russian sub-agents ended with their admonition concerning acceptable emigrants. How the Russian sub-agents recruited their passengers; how much commission they demanded as a deposit for passage; and how they guided their transmigrants across the border -- these matters went beyond the jurisdiction of the brokerage agencies. The European shipping companies required huge numbers of passengers to fill their steerage holds profitably. F. Missler and other firms brought these passengers to the ships. What happened to the emigrants en route to Missler's Bremen office did concern him. U.S. Immigration Inspector Terence V. Powderly characterized Missler as "a large hearted man who would not knowingly tolerate injustice or wrongdoing on the part

of a subordinate." But how could he control the activities of the thousands of sub-agents working for him? Had Missler or any other general agent complained about a local runner, that Russian sub-agent could just as easily have sold tickets for a less principled competitor. Thus, within Russia "agents," both those affiliated with the steamship companies as well as the unofficial ones, found a relatively free rein when it came to dealing with the emigrants.¹²

The questions remain. What exactly did all these agents do, and how were they able to exploit the emigrants? Any agent's success depended upon a steady stream of emigration from his region. Rather than leaving this emigration to chance, local agents did their best to drum up business by enticing as many emigrants as possible. Agents distributed pamphlets in Yiddish praising the United States and promising cheap steerage fares. They flooded the shtetls on market days, boasting of the successes of the emigrants whom they had personally forwarded to America. Some traveled from village to village telling "fairy tales" about the opportunities the United States offered aliens. Others employed "professional immigrants" whose very presence incited emigration fever.¹³

In his memoir Marcus Ravage vividly described the effect that the return from America of a former landsman had on his Roumanian hometown. Whereas all remembered a "slouchy, unprepossessing youngster with his toes out of his gaping boot-tips, ... a millionaire and envoy of the American government" now appeared. From that day forward Ravage observed, "everybody who was anybody had either gone

or was going to America." Agent stimulation of emigration proved so successful that as late as 1912, U.S. immigration officials deported entire groups of passengers because it was clear that local sub-agents had induced their emigration in violation of U.S. legislation. Although the laws of the U.S. and of most European nations, including Russia, prohibited the instigation of emigration, the Annual Reports of the U.S. Commissioner General of Immigration revealed over and over again that such laws were ineffective in stopping the sub-agents' activity. ¹⁴

Yet, it is doubtful whether this sub-agent activity played a decisive role in pushing the Russian Jews to emigrate. Although surely sub-agent instigation of emigration enticed some, the East European Jews, facing an ever increasingly more difficult life, especially within Russia, needed little artificial stimulus to uproot their families. Even the U.S. Immigration Commission recognized this in its report, based on data compiled in 1906, coincidentally the year of the largest Russian Jewish emigration. The Commission found that whereas sub-agents elsewhere actively encouraged emigration, "in Russia no evidence of pernicious activity on the part of the agents and sub-agents was discovered." Presumably, Russian Jews decided of their own accord to flee the hazards of the Pale of Settlement in favor of the haven offered by America. The memoir literature consistently revealed that most emigration decisions were made as family matters. Only then did the emigrants turn to the agents to arrange their migration. ¹⁵

But the matter of choosing which agent to deal with was not a simple one. Some emigrants directly contacted agents of legitimate Russian brokerage firms who openly advertised in the Jewish press the locations of their money exchange and steamship passage offices. Others found, however, that the sub-agents came to them. For with such an array of people, all hoping to make their fortunes by booking passage for those bound for the golden land, local competition proved very stiff. When the Chotzinoff family announced its intention to emigrate, agents descended upon their home. Each one promised the best rate for a complete journey from Russia to America, and when alone, exposed for the Chotzinoffs "the low business standards and unethical practices of his rivals." Unfortunately, this rivalry obscured the fact that the initial choice of an agent involved very serious matters. ¹⁶

The emigrant's European land arrangements depended upon the steamship ticket. The purchase of a ticket from an agent for a particular line determined not only which port the emigrant would sail from, but whether the emigrant would travel directly across Germany or would pass through a number of European countries in a more circuitous routing. After 1894, all emigrants in transit across Germany had to pass inspection at the newly established German border control stations. These stations only permitted emigrants entry to Germany if they were ticketed on German steamship lines or if they had booked passage on foreign lines licensed by the German authorities. Emigrants whose agents had wittingly or

unwittingly booked passage on a line not recognized by the German government found, often only after they had arrived at the border, that they had to avoid Germany altogether. ¹⁷

In selecting a sub-agent, emigrants tried, albeit often unsuccessfully, to find an honest individual who would confine himself to his legitimate commission. Many emigrants, however, had no such luck, for the Russian sub-agents followed a long standing tradition of brokers taking advantage of their less wordly passengers. Agents regularly exploited the emigrants for their own gain. From the moment they purchased a steamship ticket, the emigrants encountered a web of intrigue designed to separate them from their meagre funds. If possible, sub-agents began this deception at the outset of the emigrants' voyages by overcharging the travelers on their steamer tickets. In 1891, the president of the Hamburg local committee for Jewish exiles complained that although the steamship lines had curbed this problem within Germany, this practice continued unabated in Russia. As the tide of emigration swelled and most emigrants knew someone who could warn them of pitfalls to avoid, problems of a different nature appeared. In 1906, Alexander Harkavy investigated immigrant conditions in Europe on behalf of the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, an American Jewish organization. There he heard that some agents sold tickets below cost in order to get hold of their passengers. Once caught, these emigrants fell prey to sub-agents eager to make up their original sacrifices. ¹⁸

Sub-agents' cheating of the emigrants on their tickets included more invidious deceptions. In 1897, in Vitebsk, Samuel Chotzinoff's father patiently listened to a swarm of agents and then "finally closed with one whose straightforward sincerity inspired confidence." Three days after sailing from Germany, twelve delighted Chotzinoffs landed in "New York." No one had told them that America was so close. Only when no cousin appeared on the wharf to greet them, did the Chotzinoffs discover that they were in London, not New York, the victims of an unscrupulous agent who had taken money for passage to America, but returned tickets valid only as far as England. A representative from the London Poor Jews Temporary Shelter informed the family that unfortunately their predicament had become an all too common occurrence. ¹⁹

Having purchased a steamship ticket, the next hurdle for the emigrants was the acquisition of a passport. Because of the complexities involved here, emigrants increasingly came to rely upon the assistance of agents to facilitate these matters. The Russian law regulating foreign passports provided for one document to cover an entire family traveling abroad at a cost of fifteen rubles. But as Yanovsky noted, the passport code contained so many obvious contradictions that "the practice was devoid of any uniformity. Every province had its own order of issuing foreign passports." For example, in the provinces of Czernigov, Mohilev, and Ekaterinoslav, all in the Pale of Jewish Settlement, the authorities blatantly ignored these regulations. There every family applying for a passport

had to pay a fifteen ruble tax for each adult member noted on the travel permit. ²⁰

In these provinces as elsewhere obtaining a passport took time and money. Only officials in the provincial capitals had the authority to issue visas. Applicants from a rural area or town first had to acquire a "local burgher passport" which would enable them to travel to the seat of the provincial government to apply for the foreign passport. If the emigrants had never journeyed beyond their native town before, they had not required a local passport up till this time. Next, in addition to fifteen rubles, all foreign passport applicants had to produce a certificate from the local authorities. This declaration attested to the fact that no legal claims pended against the emigrant and that, therefore, the local officials did not object to the applicant's journeying abroad. Securing this so-called "certificate of nonexistence of objections" proved, however, far from a simple matter. Frequently, emigrants had to see the police constable, his lieutenant, and finally the district police chief in order to obtain this statement. Since "expedition was not an absolute virtue of these officials," this cost the emigrants time and most certainly bribes. ²¹

Any irregularities in the emigrant's records created further problems. If a husband had already gone abroad and was now sending for his family, his wife not only had to pay the passport fee, all other expenses, and secure the certificate of nonexistence of objections, but she also had to procure from her husband an

authorization to obtain a foreign passport. As can be imagined, few husbands had thought to leave this document behind when emigrating. Acquiring a passport became more complicated if a member of the emigrating family failed to appear on the local community rolls. Parents who did not register a child's birth or who had forgotten to record a family death faced paying up to three hundred rubles in fines. ²²

It is not surprising then that most emigrating men and women found the Russian passport system an obscure muddle. The intricacies of acquiring a passport enabled a class of middlemen, the agents, to find their niche. For a fee local agents procured the required documents and expedited the passports by dealing with the police and clerks of the provincial offices. When in some years an estimated ninety percent of the Russian Jewish emigrants traveled on prepaid tickets, the agents' only real source of income came from their fees for these passports. A passport obtained through an agent cost the emigrant eighteen to twenty rubles, but special services cost more. In Kovno, for example, the agent Shaye Yude had such high government contacts that he could expedite passports within twenty-four hours for the right fee. ²³

Here too as in all stages of the journey the agents found ways to exploit the emigrants naiveté. In one common scheme the local agent would assess each of several unrelated travelers a full passport fee. Then he would enter them all together on one passport as members of a single family. Agents could also profit by charging

each member of an emigrating family for individual passports, when only one document and one fee was required. But if applicants could not wait the one to three months necessary to secure a passport, or if they knew of personal irregularities which might incur substantial fines, or if the agent did not wish to bother with the passport, he simply guided his emigrants across the Russian frontier for a set sum. In this way the emigrants saved the time and some of the expense involved in procuring a passport. Major W. Evans-Gordon, a member of Parliament who studied emigration matters as a member of the Royal Commission on Alien Immigration estimated that not more than 10 percent of the emigrants leaving Russia had passports. ²⁴

Agent smuggling of emigrants across the German and Austrian frontiers was widespread. Both Yanovsky, writing for the Russian government, and the American consul in Hamburg, Robert P. Skinner, recognized the extensive scope of this practice. Emigrants too were well aware that they could easily leave Russia by stealing across the frontier. Qualms over an illegal exit did not seem to play a role in the emigrants' deliberations over which route to take. In fact, one family actually paid agents to smuggle them over the frontier even though they possessed legal papers. The widespread practice of furtively fleeing Russia had convinced them "that one entered Germany only by stealth." ²⁵

When weighing the relative merits of a legal versus illegal border crossing, emigrants chose the mode that appeared the

easiest and most likely to succeed at that time. The outbreak of cholera in Hamburg in 1892 had left German authorities particularly sensitive to the issue of Russians stealing across the border. Consequently, when the Antins of Plotzk emigrated from Russia in 1894, they decided that an open entry into Germany with legitimate papers was the wisest course of action for them. ²⁶

Although emigrants did try to negotiate the border independently disguised as peasants selling produce, most arranged with their Russian sub-agents for a guide to lead them across the frontier. Typically, the purchase of a steamship ticket from Russia to America included a provision for crossing the border. Sub-agents would pay guides to lead their ticketed passengers into Germany. Emigrants traveling on prepaid passage made separate arrangements with local agents for their transportation over the Russian border. Despite the fact that the Russian soldiers thickly guarded the western frontier, the Imperial government tolerated and even sanctioned this illegal exodus of hundreds of thousands of its Jewish population. In the 1880's, Count Ignatiev, author of the disabling anti-Jewish legislation, the May Laws, announced, "The Western borders are open to you Jews." And so they were, but not officially. ²⁷

While on the one hand the Russian government turned a blind eye to the illegal emigration, on the other hand emigrants could not flaunt their violation of Imperial law and brazenly march out of Mother Russia. Forced to steal secretly across the frontier,

the emigrants turned to bands of smugglers for assistance. Operating as an unofficial network facilitating the exodus, these smugglers proved expert in bribing guards and conveying the emigrants across the borderlands. Emigrants traveled by train towards the border, debarking a few miles east of the frontier. There they waited in lodging houses, usually run in collusion with the smugglers, until a guide had put together a large enough party perhaps ten to thirty people, to make it profitable to pay off the border guards. The smugglers would then ship the emigrants' baggage via wagons to the control station or lodging house on the German or Austrian side of the border. Then at night they would lead the emigrants across the frontier on foot. ²⁸

Some agents smuggled their clients across the border under the guise of legality. Many Russian frontier residents had "legitimation certificates" which permitted the local peasants to go abroad for a short period of time. Some agents, in collusion with the authorities of the frontier towns, managed to get these certificates by registering their emigrants on the local census rolls. Other smugglers instructed their transmigrants to respond to names other than their own when the gendarme read the list of those entitled to pass. ²⁹

For their services these smugglers received a few rubles from the emigrants. But when possible, these often unscrupulous men would squeeze the emigrants for as much as they could. Sometimes this financial exploitation actually exceeded the cost of a

legitimate passport. It was not uncommon for agents to agree to an initial price and then in the midst of crossing the border to demand additional monies. If the emigrants did not pay, they could sit in the middle of the frontier until they had met the guide's demands. ²⁶

This illegal crossing of the border was not without danger for the emigrants. The emigrants ran the risk of extortion by the guides. Agents could steal their money or luggage and even jeopardize their lives by threatening rape or murder. The border police could capture the illegal migrants or even worse shoot at them. Philip Cowen noted in his 1906 investigation that he had heard stories about emigrants shot or drowned during the crossing. However, he doubted if this occurred all that frequently since such news would greatly deter emigrants from attempting illegal crossings. Yet, stumbling around unfamiliar terrain in the dark at the mercy of untrustworthy agents and within range of a soldier's rifle certainly made the emigrants' illegal negotiation of the frontier fraught with danger. ³¹

The majority of the agents confined their energies to making "legitimate" transportation arrangements -- selling tickets, securing passports, or guiding their clients across the borders. However, in the decades surrounding the turn of the twentieth century, emigration was a huge business. And like many large, unwieldy, uncontrolled operations, the emigration business offered sly individuals opportunities for profit along less "legitimate"

lines. In particular, a number of agents specialized in circumventing the U.S. immigration laws. In 1882, Congress declared that diseased or impoverished immigrants were no longer welcome in the United States. Subsequent immigration legislation in 1891, 1903, and 1907, expanded the lists of persons prohibited from settling in America. U.S. law held the steamship companies liable for the costs of the return to Europe of any individual rejected at an American port as unfit for immigration. As noted above, the steamship lines tried to pass this expense onto their sub-agents. By the end of the 1890's, some agents had already taken steps to protect themselves against the possibility that anyone that they had booked might be deported. European ticket agents for the North German Lloyd Line would accept deposits equivalent to the cost of a return fare from emigrants of questionable means or health. In this way agents could book persons, likely to be excluded under U.S. immigration laws, without incurring any financial risk. Emigrants permitted to land could then apply to an American office of the steamship line to recover their deposit. The Immigration Act of 1907, made this custom of agent insurance against rejection a violation of U.S. law. Yet in 1910, the U.S. Commissioner General of Immigration found it almost impossible to stem the practice.³²

By demanding double fares from clients of questionable health, agents could insure that they would not have to pay the return transportation costs for these emigrants if they were rejected at an American port. But emigrants turned back at the gates of

America could cost an agent much more than the price of a single steamship ticket; they could cost him future business. The homecoming for emigrants rejected as unfit to enter America was not joyous. Only a few months before, the entire shtetl or town had turned out to send off the wandering son or daughter. Now he or she slunk home telling tales of the rigors of the journey, the trials of steamship steerage, and the utter despair of rejection at Ellis Island. The arrival of one such dejected emigrant could still an entire town's enthusiasm for emigration. Agents, therefore, tried to insure that those passengers deported from America did not reach home. ³³

As already noted, U.S. immigration law required the steamship companies to bear the expenses of the return voyage for any immigrants rejected at American ports. In 1895, a Treasury Department Immigration Investigation Commission recognized that despite good intentions, the American government could not force the steamship lines to return immigrants to their native towns. American authorities could deny individuals permission to land and compel the steamships to take the excluded immigrants back to Europe. However, the U.S. could exercise little control over the fate of these rejected immigrants once on European soil. Therefore, the steamships often complied with this law by simply depositing debarred immigrants at their original ports of embarkation. Well aware that rejected immigrants were left at the port cities without the means to reach their homes, the agents connived to make the trip

back even more difficult. Agents knew that they might persuade an excluded immigrant far from home to try once again to enter America or perhaps to journey elsewhere. Therefore, when booking questionable emigrants, many agents tried to bypass the port closest to the emigrant's home in favor of a more distant harbor. For particularly impoverished or clearly diseased Russian Jews this meant that local agents routed their passengers away from the relatively accessible German ports in favor of the more distant British ones. In this way agents would encourage immigrants returned to Liverpool or London or Tilbury to try their luck once more. ³⁴

Emigrants, originally denied entrance to the U.S. found numerous ways of bypassing the U.S. immigration inspection on a second try. In England agents openly advertised that with their assistance, "deportation is impossible." Agents commonly sent deported aliens back to America in the cabin classes rather than in the steerage, for until 1903, immigrant cabin passengers did not have to submit to the rigors of an inspection. When this means of contravening the U.S. immigration laws was stopped, excluded aliens journeyed to the U.S. disguised as members of the ship's crew or as stowaways. With the connivance of the ship's officers, these aliens then skipped ship once in an American harbor. Other agents sensed that at certain American ports, the vigilant guarding of America from undesirables was less exacting. Liverpool runners assured an American immigration investigator in 1905, that they could get passengers with trachoma admitted to the U.S. if they sailed on

the American Line to Philadelphia. 35

For passengers, too obviously diseased or impoverished to attempt to enter America legally, there were still other means of gaining admission. East European Jewish emigrants benefitted from the London Poor Jews' Temporary Shelter. Russian sub-agents would send clearly unfit emigrants directly to the Shelter, knowing that their passengers could stay there until they could pay their own way or until they were well enough to leave. Diseased emigrants of some means benefitted from the care of physicians at hotels maintained by the British Cunard Line. Here emigrants who could pay for treatment would remain until sufficiently cured to pass the often less than scrupulous European medical inspection. For those who could still not meet the requirements of the American immigration legislation, Canada proved a viable alternative. A Canadian destination offered the emigrants a cheaper fare and the possibility of less stringently enforced immigration laws. Agents encouraged emigrants, afraid to travel to the U.S. because of some affliction, to proceed directly to Canada. From there the emigrants could easily steal over the American border. In 1903, an Odessa general agent advised his Russian sub-agents that they could ticket any questionable emigrants via Halifax on the Hamburg-American Line without running the risk of paying for a return voyage. 36

When all these schemes failed, Russian sub-agents still proved unwilling to tell a potential emigrant not to attempt the

journey. One Jewish woman from Lodz wanted to join relatives in Montreal. Her agent, knowing she would never gain admission to Canada, routed her to Montevideo, Uruguay, assuring her that she required no passport to take a train directly from there to her family.³⁷

The Russian sub-agents strived for two things: to send as many people as possible to America and to make as much money as they could while doing this. They earned their fees by selling tickets, procuring passports, and guiding emigrants across the border. They and their British counterparts cashed in on the trade in rejected or ineligible emigrants. So far this discussion has focused largely on the experiences of these Russian agents. Yet, tens of thousands of "Hebrews" emigrated from other European countries, especially from provinces of the Austro-Hungarian Empires. In these lands too the emigrants fell prey to local emigration agents.

Although Austria-Hungary encompassed a single empire, in internal affairs the two lands operated as independent nations with their own legislative bodies. Since their emigration policies differed, Austria and Hungary must be considered separately. As late as 1907, Austria had no law regulating emigration. Any citizen who had completed military service enjoyed the right to emigrate, and most did so without passports, freely crossing the border en route to the German North Sea ports. Austria, therefore, neither restricted the right of its citizens to emigrate, nor did it protect them from the dangers of the emigration business.³⁸

Austrian failure to control the emigration business through the licensing of agents and agencies, while at the same time permitting unrestricted emigration, enabled gross exploitation of the emigrants. In fact, emigrant suffering at the hands of unscrupulous agents may have been even worse in Austria than in Russia where both agents and emigrants secretly violated the law. For in Austria agents not only conspired to exploit the emigrants, but they acted openly, knowing that they had the permission and full assistance of local provincial officials and police with whom they shared their gains. As the prosecuting attorney in a case involving sixty-five agents and officials accused of defrauding the emigrants described,

there existed within the limits of Austria a territory which actually was beyond the reach of the law, where in defiance of order and personal liberty, all kinds of tricks were played upon unfortunate emigrants. ³⁹

In the early 1880's, the steamship companies chose Oswiecim or Auschwitz as their terminal for their agencies in the Austrian province of Galicia, an area with a large Jewish population. Auschwitz proven then, as it was to demonstrate in a later era, to lie at the center of a network of rail communications. Galician emigrants could easily travel by rail directly from Auschwitz to the German North Sea ports. The original Auschwitz ticket agent for the Hamburg-American Line was Julius Neumann, the leaseholder of the refreshment rooms at the depot. Neumann exhibited such notorious behavior in procuring emigrants from his vantage point

in the terminal, that railroad authorities demanded that either he divest himself of the ticketing business or the restaurant. In 1882, he turned the ticket agency over to Herz and Lowenberg, but remained a silent partner. As emigration from Galicia increased, competition ensued. Soon the firm of Herz & Lowenberg competed against a partnership led by the railway cashier in collusion with the commissar of police. In 1886, deciding that cooperation would yield greater profit than competition, the various agents and companies combined as the Hamburg Agency at Auschwitz. This state of affairs lasted until a rival agency opened in 1888. Securing passengers on behalf of Bremen's North German Lloyd, this concern failed to come to terms with the Hamburg Agency. The two agencies and their local runners throughout Galicia brutally competed for emigrants.

Fights were of a frequent occurrence at remote villages, at railway stations, and in the cars between the representatives of rival agencies. The scenes at the railway depot at Auschwitz where the armed runners of both agencies posted themselves to receive the emigrants, defy description. Blood flowed freely, each party trying to get possession of the emigrants, who thereby suffered as much as the runners themselves by being knocked about. After the fight was over each party drove its victims to its own agency.

Only after such violence disrupted the law and order of Galicia, did the governor of the province begin an investigation into the Auschwitz agencies. 40

For close to a decade the ticket agents, depot staff, chief of police, custom-house officials, railway officers, frontier guards, and even the chief of the county (Bezirkshauptmann) had attacked the emigrants, deprived them of their personal liberty and property, and extorted, robbed, and defrauded them. The Galician peasants had tolerated these injustices, not simply because they were naive, but because uniformed "officials" threatened them with imprisonment if they tried to escape. Arriving at Auschwitz, the emigrants were greeted by men armed with clubs and whips who herded them like cattle to a "hotel." Held captive there to prevent escape, the emigrants paid exorbitant prices for their enforced accommodations. From there the emigrants were hauled before the "Imperial Royal Agency." The offices of the Hamburg Agency were designed to give the emigrants the impression that they faced authorities of the Empire. A uniformed official addressed as "Herr Bezirkshauptmann" stood before the emigrants. "Herr Bezirkshauptmann" ordered the travelers to hand over their documents and cash. ⁴¹

The emigrants who refused to purchase tickets from the Hamburg Agency or who had prepaid passages were singled out. The commissar of police entered in dress uniform. Acting as the imperial royal police office, he confiscated all prepaid tickets and demanded that the emigrants purchase new tickets at arbitrarily set prices from the "Imperial Royal Agency." Those who refused, he slapped, threatened with arrest and return to their homes. Those short of money had to cable to relatives for funds. ⁴²

The purchase of tickets from the "Imperial Royal Agency," however, did not guarantee that the emigrant went on from there to Hamburg with the rest of his or her funds intact. The Hamburg Agency employed a number of other schemes to extort further profit from the emigrants. One of the partners of the agency proceeded to conduct a medical examination. The "medical officer" would undoubtedly find the emigrant unfit to emigrate. Then his partner would confide to the emigrant that ten florins might buy the necessary approval. Or, the agents played the alarm clock trick. They told the emigrant that he had to pay to telegraph ahead to Hamburg to see if there was room on board the ship. An alarm in another room rang to signal when the telegram was despatched and a reply received. Sometimes the agents even telegraphed the Emperor of America to see if His Highness would grant the would-be emigrant permission to enter his dominions. ⁴³

Surely, this Galician emigration swindle was a gross example of agent abuse of emigrants which ended with the closing of the Hamburg Agency in 1889, and the trial of the malicious agents and officials. Yet, without any serious regulation of emigration in Austria, emigrants continued to suffer at the hands of agents who extorted their funds and then intimidated them to silence. Even in Hungary, which regulated emigration more strictly, exploitation of the emigrants continued, facilitated by the legitimate arrangements made between agents and government officials. ⁴⁴

Hungary, unlike Austria, regulated emigration. In 1881, the government demanded that all emigration agencies secure licenses to operate. By 1903, when a more restrictive emigration law became effective, no business had registered. The new legislation placed all emigration affairs in the hands of the government. It required that emigrants secure permission to depart, and it enabled the government to direct the route of these emigrants. This last provision, ostensibly designed to help Hungary protect its citizens, also allowed the government to develop its own ports and transportation facilities and to profit from this growing trade.⁴⁵

The Hungarian authorities used the 1903 law to make exclusive arrangements with the Cunard Line to transport all emigrants to New York via the port of Fiume. In 1904, a government circular warned,

If anyone should intend to emigrate across the sea in a different direction from the designated route, he cannot be prevented therefrom by forcible means; but in his own interest he must be warned that the Hungarian authorities have no means of affording emigrants such protection and assistance against injuries and losses that may occur on other routes, as are assured them on the designated route.

Such regulations were designed to divert Hungarian emigrants from the German North Sea ports. Yet, of the 193,460 Hungarian emigrants entering the United States in the fiscal year 1907, only 39,523 had embarked from Fiume.⁴⁶

The Adria steamship company had represented Cunard in its dealings with the government. The fact that many of the shareholders of Adria were also members of the Hungarian nobility or

government officials had smoothed the negotiations. Following the conclusion of this agreement, the government licensed the Bureau of Tourists and Travel to book all Hungarian emigrants on the Cunard Line. The Bureau, however, proved to be merely a subsidiary of Adria. Under the terms of the contract with Cunard the Hungarian government and Adria earned profits for every emigrant that the Line carried. The German ticket agencies, obviously not ready to concede the loss of the lucrative Hungarian trade to Cunard tried also to cultivate government connections. As the figures noted above suggest, they were successful. The German agencies continued to operate within Hungary both illegally and when necessary, by paying commissions to the government or to Adria for the right to sell tickets. ⁴⁷

Competition ensued between the agencies working for the German lines and the Bureau. Each side promised the cheapest fare and the best accommodations. But as the recognized government agency, the Bureau had the advantage of cooperation with local authorities. Emigrants who had received prepaid tickets from relatives already in America had to apply for permission to emigrate. Once the police were notified, they informed the Bureau. Then with police assistance, the Bureau's agents would confiscate the prepaid tickets and demand that the emigrants exchange them for transportation via Cunard. Emigrants complained that the agents of the Bureau's ticket offices were in league with gendarmes, county officials, and even railroad conductors, so that no Hungarian

emigrant could apply for a passport or cross the border without an agent from the monopoly forcing him or her to buy tickets. And like in Austria, this alliance between agents and local officials facilitated the Hungarian agents' exploitation of the emigrants. For, they could charge excessive fares or force their clients to exchange their currency at unfavorable rates, knowing that no authority would intervene. ⁴⁸

The emigration business everywhere pitted agents against emigrants in a continual struggle where the travelers tried to safeguard their funds while the agents strove for every possible profit in this highly competitive field. Yet, American Jewish immigrants, saving to bring relatives over from the old country, had to turn once again to the agents. In 1907, the U.S. Immigration Commission studied the recent development of immigrant banks. Not properly financial institutions, these were actually side-lines to businesses like groceries and saloons where emigrants congregated. The Commissioners discovered that these "bankers" not only advised the immigrants, but that most of the estimated 2600 savings banks also functioned as steamship ticket agencies. Of the 116 banks that the Commissioners investigated, 94 percent sold trans-Atlantic passages. The immigrants trusted these ticket agent-bankers:

To (the immigrant) the steamship agent is the sole connecting link with the fatherland. As the representative of well-known lines, he ascribes to the agent a standing and responsibility such as he has no cause to assign to an American institution. Nothing is more natural

than that the immigrant should take his savings to the agent and ask that the agent send them home for him. Having made the start, it is natural that he should continue to leave with the agent for safe-keeping his weekly or monthly surplus, so that he may accumulate a sufficient amount for another remittance or for the purpose of buying a steamship ticket to bring his family to this country.... 49

But the Commissioners found that this system bred fraud. No agency supervised the bankers or obligated them to keep careful records. If a businessman sent a money order to an immigrant's European relatives, it might take the immigrant months to find out whether or not the money had arrived. If it did not, his "banker" might well have disappeared by the time he went to demand a refund. Not only did the Commissioners suspect the banking activities of these institutions, but they found problems as well with the sale of the steamship tickets. During the course of his investigation in Europe, immigration inspector Philip Cowen met a number of Russian Jews whose prepaid tickets were not going to get them to America. Either their tickets lacked a seller's name, or they omitted the name of any steamship line, or no one had arranged to honor these passages. Cowen found a number of these victims stranded in the ports to which they had journeyed. Noticing a strong similarity in the form of these imperfect prepaids issued by five different agencies, Cowen wondered whether he had uncovered a clique of dishonest agents. 50

In 1912, Mary Antin, formerly of Plotzk, more recently of Boston and New York, recaptured the scene some eighteen years

earlier when she and her family set off for America.

The procession resembled both a funeral and a triumph. The women wept over us, reminding us eloquently of the perils of the sea, of the bewilderment of a foreign land, and of the torments of homesickness that awaited us. They bewailed my mother's lot, who had to tear herself away from blood relations to go among strangers; who had to face gendarmes, ticket agents, and sailors, unprotected by a masculine escort; who had to care for four young children in the confusion of travel, and very likely feed them trefah or see them starve on the way. Or they praised her for a brave pilgrim, and expressed confidence in her ability to cope with gendarmes and ticket agents...

The friends and relatives who saw the Antins off had all heard of the difficulties that emigrants commonly encountered en route to America. Prominent in their listing of people who could make trouble for the Antins were the agents. This discussion of the agents, the services they performed for the emigrants, and the ways in which they could cheat even the most savvy of travelers has suggested that in this case the concerns of the Antins' family and friends were well grounded. 51

NOTES

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- 2 NA, RG 85, 51411/1, p. 31; United States, 59th Congress, 1st session, 5 Dec. 1905. Congressional Record 40(1):101; U.S., 52nd Cong., 1st sess., 1892. House Executive Document 235, Part I (Congressional Serial Set Volume 2957): Enforcement of Alien Contract Labor Laws, pp. 12, 137; Leon Alter, "General and Technical Aspects of Jewish Migrations -- Arrangements with Steamship Companies, Protection Against Exploitation," typescript, New York Public Library, 17 April 1944, p. 4.
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- 4 NA, RG 85, 51411/1, p. 35.
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- 10 Alter, pp. 2, 8; NA, RG 85, 51411/1, pp. 31-32.
- 11 H. Rep. 3472 (serial 2886): p. 448; H. Exec. Doc. 235 (serial 2957): pp. 112, 142-44; U.S., 57th Cong., 1st sess., 1901. H. Doc. 184 (serial 4345): Reports of the Industrial Commission on Immigration, pp. xci, 110-113.
- 12 NA, RG 85, 51411/51, Report of T.V. Powderly to the Immigration Commission, 9 Jan. 1907, p. 30; H. Exec. Doc. 235 (serial 2957): pp. 21-22.
- 13 Elsewhere sub-agents proved equally ingenious in their promotion of the Americas. In Italy they handed out cards bearing hymns praising America to all churchgoers; Sen. Doc. 748 (serial 5870): p. 64. In Poland agents encouraged Catholics to emigrate to Brazil with the news that the Pope had bought land there. They claimed His Eminence was parcelling out this land to good Polish Catholics in order to save them from an impending forced conversion to Russian Orthodoxy; H. Exec. Doc. 235 (serial 2957): p. 96.
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- U.S., 43rd Cong., 1st sess., 1874. Sen. Exec. Doc. 23 (serial 1580): Steerage Passengers on Emigrant Vessels, p. 124; H. Exec. Doc. 235 (serial 2957): pp. 112-13; American Jewish Historical Society, Waltham, Massachusetts. Alexander Harkavy Papers, Diary of a Visit to Europe in the Interests of Jewish Emigration, 1906, transcribed by Marc Lee Raphael, p. 5.
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- 23 Yanovsky, Sen. Doc. 748 (serial 5870): p. 258; NA, RG 59, 158.612/256, Despatch of Consul Robert P. Skinner, 27 Oct. 1910; NA, RG 85, 51411/1, p. 35; Szajkowski, pp. 110-11; NA, RG 85, 51411/56, pp. 11-13; American Jewish Archives, Biographies File, Letter, Louis N. Lee to his nephew, 18 Aug. 1947.
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- 29 Yanovsky, Sen. Doc. 748 (serial 5870): p. 258; NA, RG 59, 862.55/2; Wertheimer, p. 45; Cohen, p. 59; Royal Commission, 13349.
- 30 Antin, p. 23; For examples of forcing the emigrants to pay more in the midst of their border crossings, see Cowen, pp. 235-36; Cahan, pp. 198-99; Royal Commission, 16401.
- 31 Wischnitzer, p. 108; Benjamin Gordon reported hearing shooting as he ran across the frontier into Germany; Between Two Worlds: The Memoirs of a Physician (New York, 1952), p. 130; as did Sol Feinstone, pp. 38-39; NA, RG 85, 51411/56, pp. 13-15; The night before Cowen inspected the German control station at Eydtkuhnen, a man was shot while attempting to cross the stream there. NA, RG 85, 51411/1, pp. 70-71; Wertheimer, p. 45.
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- 34 Sec. 4, 22 Stat. 214; H. Doc. 184 (serial 4345): p. cix; Brandenburg, pp. 38-39, 152, 40-41.
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43. H. Rep. 3472 (serial 2886): pp. 941, 948; Alter reported that the same schemes were common at the port of Hamburg. p. 4-5.
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Chapter III

The Land Arrangements:

The Emigrants-in-transit through Germany

Having overcome the obstacles of dealing with the agents, most East European Jewish emigrants headed for Germany on their way to America. Whether they left from Russia or from Austria-Hungary, the common route to the seaports lay over German soil. Obviously, emigrants sailing from Hamburg or Bremen had to pass through the Second Reich. But even East European Jewish emigrants bound for other distant ports -- Antwerp, Rotterdam, Amsterdam or Liverpool -- crossed Germany. The Hilfsvereins der Deutschen Juden, a German-Jewish philanthropic organization active in assisting Jewish transmigrants, estimated that for the years 1905-09, of the 700,000 East European Jews who migrated, 416,000 had traveled through Germany on their way west.¹

The East European Jews opted for emigration via Germany for a number of reasons. Those fleeing Russia found Russian shipping facilities ill-equipped to transport the huge numbers clamoring to emigrate. In fact, Russian fleets only entered the trans-Atlantic steerage business in 1906, when two shipping lines began to offer direct service from the Baltic port of Libau to New York. But since most Russian Jews lacked the passports necessary for legal emigration, they could not embark on ships docked in Russian waters. Instead, they crept out of Russia by stealth, and by reason of its geographic proximity to their homes, they found themselves on German soil. There

both German shipping interests and the German Jews encouraged the East European Jews' transmigration.²

The German shipping lines required large numbers of emigrants to fill their huge steerage holds. Joseph Powderly, a member of the 1891 United States Immigration Commission, recognized the economic advantages of the steerage trade. "The aim of every steamship company is to make money; the money is made in carrying passengers; the more passengers, the more money." And the steerage carried the most passengers. Even though steerage travelers paid only one-half to one-third the cabin fare, their accommodations cost the steamship companies so little that per capita the shipping lines netted the greatest profit on these emigrants. In 1901, the U.S. Industrial Commission on Immigration found that the average steerage fare cost \$22.50, but the actual cost to the steamship line for transporting a steerage passenger amounted to \$1.70. The German steamship companies, the Hamburg-American Line and the North German Lloyd Line, could not afford to ignore the hundreds of thousands of Jews who, in their rush to escape the poverty and persecutions of Eastern Europe, enriched the shipping companies that brought them to America.³

And the German Jews inadvertently encouraged their East European co-religionists to cross Germany on their way to America; for the German Jews' philanthropic efforts created a network of organizations designed to assist the transmigrants. These eased the emigrants' journey by providing medical care, hospices, kosher food, clothing, advice, and even direct gifts of money. The combination of these

factors - the proximity of Germany, the business interests of the German steamship companies, and the philanthropy of the German Jews - made transmigration across Germany the most favored route to America for the East European Jews.⁴

Imperial Germany tolerated the incursions of these East European Jews, not out of humanitarian concern over the plight of these refugees but because the waves of Jewish emigrants stimulated important areas of the German economy. East European Jewish emigration began in the winter of 1868-69, when famine and cholera in Russia propelled Russian Jews to flee west into Germany. By 1914, when the outbreak of World War I sealed Germany's borders, perhaps two million Jews had passed through the Reich on their way west. Salo Baron has estimated that whereas between 1820 and 1870, only 7,500 Russian Jews settled in the United States, some 40,000 Russian Jews immigrated in the 1870's, despite the American economic crisis of 1873, that stymied much of the overseas immigration. Until 1881, however, "the idea of America as a possible locale for collective renewal had not yet sunk deeply into the consciousness of the East European Jews." But after the onset of the pogroms in that year, the rate of East European Jewish emigration accelerated. Only the outbreak of World War I halted this exodus.⁵

More than half of these East European Jews traveled on the Reich's railroads and sailed in the steerages of the German steamships. In fact, the rise in the numbers of East European Jewish emigrants paralleled a tremendous growth in the German merchant marine, a development encouraged by government subsidies as part of the effort to

make Germany a major maritime power rivalling the British.⁶ East European Jews accounted for a significant proportion of the steerage passengers on the ships of the Hamburg-American (Hapag) and North German Lloyd (Lloyd) Lines. In 1905, of the 284,787 foreigners embarking from German ports, approximately 53,000 were East European Jews. In 1906, of the 173,483 passengers sailing from Hamburg, 50,000 were East European Jews; of the 271,112 boarding ship at Bremen, 26,700 were East European Jews. Between 1909 and 1913, when 414,959 East European Jews immigrated to the United States, 128,879 East European Jews sailed from Hamburg and another 102,417 embarked at Bremen.⁷

The profits earned on the steerage trade enabled the German shipping magnates to build ever larger and faster ships, stimulating the growth of Germany's commercial lines. Yet, in the matter of these Jewish emigrants, the interests of the German shipping companies often conflicted with the interests of the Reich. For while the German steamship companies wanted all East European Jews to embark on their ships, these Jews had to travel a lengthy distance across Germany in order to do so. Government officials worried about the problems these travelers might pose to their states, citizens, and relief institutions on their way to the ports of Bremen and Hamburg. But more importantly, the presence of these transmigrants alarmed German leaders for they raised the spectre of an unwanted mass immigration. In his dissertation, "German Policy and Jewish Politics: The Absorption of the East European Jews in Germany, 1868-1914,"

Jack Wertheimer demonstrated how German administrators successfully discouraged East European Jewish settlement, so that out of the three million Jews migrating in those years, only some 70,000 settled in the Reich. German policies vis-à-vis the Jewish transmigrants reflected this paramount concern that the East European Jews, bound for the North Sea ports of embarkation, should not have the opportunity to stay within the Empire.⁸

Therefore, the dilemma materialized -- how could the authorities protect Germany from these Jewish transmigrants without injuring the business interests of the railroads and shipping lines and the maritime affairs of the Second Reich? The solution lay in a program of administrative measures designed to channel and direct the transmigrants in order to make certain that they reached the ports of embarkation as expeditiously as possible. German leaders prevented a mass immigration of East European Jews, in part, by effectively controlling every stage of the transmigrants' journey from the moment they crossed the frontier until they boarded a steamship bound for the Atlantic. This supervision of the transmigrants' passage enabled the flow of emigrant traffic to reach the ports where it brought prosperity to German shipping. Yet, at the same time this careful regulation of the emigrants-in-transit prevented any of this "unwanted element" from insinuating themselves into the Reich. While the numbers of transmigrants remained slight, the German authorities quickly dispatched the emigrants to the ports on an ad hoc basis. But in the 1890's, as the number of emigrants swelled, German

officials instituted a comprehensive set of administrative measures to deal with the emigrants-in-transit. By isolating these Jews as they crossed the Empire, German leaders prevented them from having the opportunity to stop and explore the possibilities of life within the Reich. Instead the Jewish transmigrants only saw Germans and Germany in a blur as the emigrant trains sped through the country.⁹

The German authorities justified what will be seen as extraordinary measures dealing with these emigrants, by claiming that they were protecting the German people from the dangers posed by these emigrants-in-transit. Wertheimer has shown how government leaders stereotyped East European Jews as "parasitical Schnorrers, bomb-throwing conspirators, and vermin-infested beggars." The latter image particularly enabled German officials to dispatch the transmigrants to the ports in an efficient, if often crude, fashion. For these administrators claimed that in so doing, they guarded the German people against contamination from these disease-bearing Jews, and they saved the German public relief institutions the burden of caring for these impoverished refugees. And while German officials did not emphasize the fact, clearly their piloting of the emigrants to the ports also insured that none of these wayfarers became unwanted permanent settlers.¹⁰

Even German Jews recognized that the restraints imposed on the freedom of movement of the transmigrants, while understandably objectionable to the Jewish emigrants, were essential to protect the German populace from the problems that a migration of this size could create.

Furthermore, German Jews sanctioned these forwarding measures; for not only did they safeguard the state and its citizens, but they also supposedly protected the East European Jews from the unscrupulous persons who elsewhere exploited inexperienced emigrants.¹¹

Prior to 1881, the German authorities imposed few restrictions on the movement of the relatively small numbers of Jewish transmigrants through Germany. But in the early 1880's, local authorities played an increasing role in regulating the affairs of the emigrants-in-transit. The beginning of the pogroms in Russia sparked a new wave of Jewish emigration. While most of these refugees congregated in Brody, Austria and were forwarded from there through Antwerp and Liverpool by the Alliance Israelite Universelle, others fled across Germany to Hamburg. The rise in the numbers of Jewish emigrants prompted state and city officials to take measures to supervise the emigrants heading for the ports. In 1881, Prussia issued decrees forbidding transmigrants to remain in Germany for more than forty-eight hours. At Eydtkuhnen on the Prussian-Russian border, local officials worked with a committee of German Jews to forward the refugees directly to Hamburg. In Berlin, a ministerial committee organized to oversee the passage of the Russian Jews through the city. All of these measures were designed to expedite the transmigrants' journey, so that they passed swiftly through Germany and out of the country.¹²

Not only were German officials concerned with speeding the emigrants on their way, but they also tried to insure the isolation of the transmigrants on German soil. Immigrant memoirs have recorded

the existence of special emigrant trains as early as 1881. Bernard Horwich described his experiences on one such train as he traveled from Eydtkuhnen to Hamburg.

We were huddled into eight or ten cars, traveling fourth class. The coaches were merely huge boxes with no seats and only a few windows for ventilation. They closely resembled cattle cars.

By locking these trains and limiting or eliminating the number of stops at which the transmigrants could debark, the German officials insured the segregation of all emigrants-in-transit.¹³

This isolation of the transmigrants stemmed in part from the fear that the "vermin-infested" Jewish refugees might spread disease and epidemics as they crossed Germany. As early as 1882, German officials noted that they must exercise sanitary precautions when dealing with the transmigrants. And in that same year government officials ordered the delousing of all transmigrants prior to permitting them to travel through Germany.¹⁴

These various administrative measures taken in 1881-82 to oversee the passage of the emigrants-in-transit -- a swift dispatching of the emigrants to the ports, their isolation on German soil, and the early demands for disinfection of the travelers -- demonstrate the directions that all future efforts of German control of the transmigrants would take. However, a more systematic control of the emigrants-in-transit only developed in response to changes on the other side of the Atlantic.

In his 1922 dissertation Bernhard Karlsberg suggested that control of the emigrants-in-transit originated in Germany in direct

response to the "pressure of the severe application" of the United States Immigration Act of 1882. This law prohibited the landing of paupers, lunatics, and the insane and ordered that they return to their original ports of embarkation. These provisions made the Immigration Act of 1882 the first piece of restrictive American immigration legislation. German authorities feared the settlement of persons expelled under this law, for rejected Jewish immigrants, deported to Bremen or Hamburg, had to make independent arrangements for their remigration to Russia. And just as the Americans did not want impoverished or mentally deficient immigrants, neither did the Germans. While German administrators worried about the potential impact of this "paupers" law, loose American enforcement postponed any test of the act until 1884. In August of that year, U.S. inspectors ordered the deportation of a number of impoverished Russian Jews who had taken passage from Hamburg. The arrival of these Jews sparked the concern of Prussian authorities, especially when they discovered that repatriating Russian Jews, who had illegally emigrated without passports, proved "nearly impossible."¹⁵

The fear that those emigrants, rejected as unfit to immigrate by American authorities and barred from remigrating by Russian frontier guards, might settle in Germany led to a new stage in the development of German control of the transmigrants. Whereas earlier measures had aimed at isolating the emigrants and speeding them across Germany, now control of the transmigrants took on the added aspect of selection. By the end of 1884, on its eastern frontier, Prussia had

implemented a system of border control designed to weed out those Russian immigrants unlikely to pass the tests of the 1882 U.S. Immigration Act.¹⁶

At railroad stations along the frontier, Prussian gendarmes questioned all emigrants to make certain that they possessed valid Russian passports and an indeterminate amount of money, before permitting them to proceed on their journeys to the North Sea ports. These examination measures continued despite the fact that American enforcement of its "pauper" legislation was so irregular that by the fall of 1885, German administrators still did not have any notion as to what criteria the American authorities applied when deporting a "pauper." In the spring of 1886, some German border officials set their own standards for indigence, admitting only transmigrants in possession of four hundred marks. These measures selecting those permitted to transmigrate across Germany proved especially harsh for the Jewish emigrants, for impoverished Russian Jews could scarcely afford to purchase a passport, let alone meet the tests of financial solvency required by the German authorities.¹⁷

German Jewry responded to the dilemma of its Russian co-religionists by attempting to mitigate the effects of the Prussian exclusionary legislation. Various local and provincial committees worked on behalf of the Jewish transmigrants. The Deutsches Central-Komitee für die Russischen Juden (DCK) worked to gain some relief of the frontier control. This organization arranged with the German authorities to sponsor certain Jewish transmigrants who lacked the documents or funds

necessary to cross Germany. The DCK accepted full responsibility for forwarding these East European Jews directly to the German ports. The organization pledged that if any of its charges suffered rejection at an American port, it would guarantee the remigration of the emigrant to Russia. The DCK established committees at the most common emigrant crossing points in East Prussia and Upper Silesia. These committees handled the process of selecting candidates suitable for emigration to America, and provided shelter, food, clothing, medical and legal assistance. The German authorities endorsed the efforts of the DCK since they insured that none of these transmigrants became unwanted immigrants, while at the same time permitting the flow of immigrant traffic, vital to the German steamship companies.¹⁸

From 1884 to 1892, German control of the emigrants-in-transit essentially followed a basic policy of denying all impecunious transmigrants permission to cross Germany. Yet, local administrators made numerous exceptions when enforcing this principle since no uniform Imperial law existed. Not only did the DCK have a special arrangement, but periodically various German officials exempted travelers, possessing either railroad tickets to a German port or a German steamer ticket, from the means test. And even where the paupers inspection was scrupulously carried out, impoverished transmigrants could still circumvent the rule, for eager ticket agents would loan their passengers enough money to cross into Germany.¹⁹

The policy of screening emigrants-in-transit for compliance with the U.S. Immigration Act of 1882 at the German border unexpectedly

came to a halt in 1892. In that year the German authorities closed the frontier to all transmigrant traffic. In the summer of 1892, cholera had broken out in Hamburg. Blaming the epidemic on the emigrants-in-transit, the Hamburg Senate sealed the city against all Russian and Austro-Hungarian emigrants. The outbreak of cholera in Hamburg, attributed to these transmigrants, gave Prussia an excuse to close its borders to emigrants bound for the German steamship steerages on the grounds that their presence constituted a health danger. This blockade of all transmigrant traffic seemed an essential, although drastic, step necessary to safeguard the German public from the transmigrants, especially the "vermin-infested" East European Jews.²⁰

It became increasingly apparent that the German authorities had aimed this blockade at the Russian Jews, who in 1892, comprised 78.8 percent of all Russian emigrants. For as German administrators gradually lifted the embargo on the steerage transmigrants, their new regulations continued to affect impecunious Jews. In March of 1893, Prussian officials once again opened the Austro-Hungarian border to steerage traffic. When they reopened the Russian frontier two months later, only those possessing passports plus the equivalent of four hundred marks or those traveling on second class tickets were admitted. German officials presumed that well-to-do emigrants did not spread disease. Thus, one year after the cholera epidemic Germany remained off-limits to the most impoverished emigrants-in-transit, those who could afford neither passports, four hundred marks, nor second cabin passage, namely the Russian Jews.²¹

The continued closing of the German border to indigent transmigrants had a severe impact on the size of the East European Jewish emigration. In 1892, 81,511 Russians immigrated to America. In 1893, only 42,310 Russians entered the United States. But the shock to the Russian Jewish emigrant traffic was more severe. Russian Jewish migration to America decreased from 64,253 in 1892, to 25,161 in 1893, a drop of 61 percent. Since the number of Russian Jews attempting emigration had climbed rather steadily until 1892, the decline can surely be linked to the sealing of the Prussian frontier and its impact upon the transmigrants.²²

Yet, despite the closing of the border the traffic continued to flow. Although three times the usual number of gendarmes guarded the frontier, groups of emigrants managed to find places to cross. In the spring of 1893, while the border remained sealed against all steerage traffic, an estimated two thousand Russian emigrants illegally entered Germany in one month. Since Prussia permitted cabin passengers the right to pass through its domains, the North German Lloyd managed to get some steerage travelers admitted under the guise that they were sailing in the cabin. At Bremen these emigrants would exchange their partially paid second cabin tickets for steerage fares. And for a few Russian Jews, the DCK continued its special system of arrangements.²³

Although this circumventing of the frontier control permitted some steerage passengers to reach the German ports, the closing of the Russian border to transmigrant traffic clearly harmed the

commercial enterprise of the German lines, causing grave dissatisfaction in the headquarters of Hapag and North German Lloyd. The blockade on the emigrants-in-transit cost the steamship companies approximately nine million marks in lost revenue in 1892-93. The antagonism between the shipping companies and those administrators demanding protection of the Reich mounted as it became apparent that the Jewish emigrants, blamed for spreading the epidemic, were not at fault. Heinrich Wiegand, the leader of the North German Lloyd, found that even though his ships continued to carry Russian Jews, his steerages remained free of any cholera contagion. Even the Hamburg Senate formally absolved the transmigrants of responsibility for the epidemic. Yet, once the epidemic had subsided, the fear that the Russian Jews spread disease did not abate. As long as a restrictive policy on admitting emigrants-in-transit remained effective, the German steamship companies continued to suffer a severe loss of business.²⁴

The deficits of the German steamship companies, coupled with the recognition that foreign lines benefitted from the continued emigration of Russian Jews who chose routes other than through the Reich, pushed Hapag and Lloyd to work together to find a way to maintain the flow of the transmigrants while at the same time protecting the health and relief consideration of Imperial Germany. In his memoirs Heinrich Wiegand recalled how he perceived that the solution to the problems posed by the transmigrant traffic was not to stem the tide, but rather to control it. In 1893, he proposed to the Prussian

Minister of the Interior, Grafen Eulenburg, a plan for a comprehensive regulation of the emigrants-in-transit.²⁵

Wiegand advocated opening a number of places along the frontier where traffic could legitimately enter. Here the German authorities could station police and sanitary officers to select those emigrants fit to cross the Reich. At these checkpoints the border guard would interrogate all emigrants to make certain that they possessed the necessary tickets and means for their journey through and beyond Germany. This would reassure German leaders that none of these emigrants might suddenly become unwanted immigrants. Then these officials would scrutinize all emigrants bound for America to see that they complied both with the "paupers test" and with the 1891 U.S. legislation which had banned the immigration of all persons "suffering from a loathsome or contagious disease." Presumably, this would both eliminate the problem of the return of rejected immigrants and safeguard Germany from infections like the 1892 cholera epidemic. Next, in order to guarantee that those permitted to traverse Germany did not pose any unapparent sanitary threat, the plan called for the bathing of all emigrants and the disinfection of their baggage at these sites. From these stations all duly registered and "clean" transmigrants would then move on to the seaports in special trains. Attracted to the idea, Eulenburg left Wiegand to work out the details. This scheme promised to introduce order and systematization to the handling of the transmigrants, controlling their movements from the moment they entered the Reich until they exited on board a German steamer. Accordingly, when the first series

of such checkpoints were built late in 1894, they became known as kontrollstationen, or control stations.²⁶

On April 3, 1895, by order of the German Minister of the Interior, five control stations were established on the Russian frontier to regulate the transit of emigrants through Prussia to Hamburg and Bremen. Transmigrants, seemingly fit to pass the tests of the American immigration laws, could now continue on their journeys under the supervision of Hapag and Lloyd representatives, even if they lacked the kinds of documentation - passports, money, or cabin tickets - that German officials had periodically required since 1884.²⁷

Acting in concert as the Central Administration of the Control Stations, Hapag and Lloyd actually ran the stations. The German government held the steamship companies liable for all expenses associated with these passenger depots and the transfer of the emigrants to the seaports. The ordinance directed the lines to provide food, lodging, medical care, and in the case of death, burial for all emigrants-in-transit through Germany. It also enjoined the companies to transport the emigrants "if possible, in separate sections and without being brought in contact with other people, to the ports of embarkation." Should any emigrant have passed through Germany, only to be rejected at an American port as unfit for immigration, the steamship companies had to bear the costs of the repatriation of the returnee. Only emigrants possessing a German steamship ticket, a lawful passport, the entire sum necessary for the trip, plus the

equivalent of four hundred marks per adult and one hundred marks per child could escape the scrutiny of the collection sites.²⁸

Essentially, the guarantees that the steamship lines had hammered out with the German government were similar to those that the DCK had already pioneered for the Russian Jews it had sponsored. Only now the steamship companies undertook responsibility for all transmigrants. Hapag and Lloyd now assured the German government that they would see that all emigrants-in-transit through Germany met the tests of foreign immigration laws. They bore the obligation for the forwarding or remigration of the transmigrants without impinging upon the German state, people, or charitable institutions. Thus, the business of handling the transmigrants rested, not with the government or any philanthropic organization, but with the huge enterprises who derived their very livelihood from the trade in emigrants.²⁹

The erection of the control stations marked the culmination of trends evident in the German administration of the transmigrants since the Russian Jewish emigration of 1881. These tendencies - an interest in the sanitary condition of the travelers and their effects, a swift dispatching of the emigrants to the seaports, the isolation of the emigrants on German soil plus attention to American immigration legislation - were all concentrated in these institutions. The network of kontrollstationen, thus, enabled the German authorities to oversee and control effectively the affairs of all emigrants-in-transit through the Reich.

In 1895, control stations at Bajorhen, Eydtkuhnen, Prostken, Illowo, and Ottlotschin on the Russian border opened. A few months earlier, in October 1894, registration stations had been constructed at Myslowitz and Ratibor on the Austrian frontier. These initially differed from the control stations in that they required no medical examination and that Hapag and Lloyd managed the registration stations. But the distinctions between the control and registration stations seem to have blurred, for in 1908, when Anna Herkner, a member of the U.S. Immigration Commission, passed through Myslowitz disguised as a peasant, she underwent a medical exam. When Maurice Fishberg, an inspector for the U.S. Bureau of Immigration, visited Europe in 1904, he observed the impact of these stations:

As soon as a Russian emigrant crosses the frontier, he is practically placed under arrest by a gendarme and kept under arrest until he embarks on the steamship bound for the country of his destination.³⁰

In the first year of their operation, many emigrants managed to avoid the recently established control stations. This caused the Germans to build additional terminals at Tilsit and Insterburg in 1896. To counteract the continued problem of emigrants bypassing these checkpoints, in 1897, the steamship companies established a collecting station at Thorn to hold the transmigrants crossing in this area until their transfer to a full kontrollstation. The Germans continued to erect new stations as needed. By 1904, control stations had opened at Posen and Ostrovo, and another registration depot had been built at Leipzig. As old buildings became too

dilapidated for continued use, the Germans either refurbished them, or they built new structures at nearby sites. Stations located at St. Ludwig, Bingerbrueck, and Thorn replaced the antiquated ones at Insterburg and Ottlotschin. On the eve of World War I, the Germans maintained fourteen control and registration stations on the borders of the Empire with an interior control station at Ruhleben on the outskirts of Berlin.³¹

When Gustav H. Schwab, the New York agent for the North German Lloyd Line, appeared before the Industrial Commission on Immigration in 1899, he boasted that each of the control stations was "completely equipped for the comfort and convenience of its passengers;" that they offered steam-heated sleeping and living rooms, bathrooms, and restaurants; and that physicians, male and female attendants, and competent managers assured the health and welfare of all transmigrants. But when Mary Antin described her experiences in the Berlin checkpoint in 1894, most likely the interior station at Ruhleben, a rather different picture emerged:

Here we had been taken to a lonely place where only that house was to be seen; our things were taken away, our friends separated from us; a man came to inspect us, as if to ascertain our full value; strange-looking people driving us about like dumb animals, helpless and unresisting; children we could not see crying in a way that suggested terrible things; ourselves driven into a little room where a great kettle was boiling on a little stove; our clothes taken off, our bodies rubbed with a slippery substance that might be any bad thing; a shower of warm water let down on us without warning; again driven to another little room where we sit, wrapped in woollen blankets till large coarse bags are brought in, their

contents turned out, and we see only a cloud of steam, and hear the women's orders to dress ourselves, -- "Quick! Quick! - or you'll miss the train!" -- Oh, so we really won't be murdered! They are only making us ready for the continuing of our journey, cleaning us of all suspicions of dangerous sickness. Thank God!

Both depictions of the control stations contain elements of truth. One's point of view of the control stations, however, depended upon where one stood -- on the outside, looking in or, locked inside, looking out.³²

At the railroad stations on the Russian and Austrian frontiers a special squad of German gendarmes arrested all third and fourth class passengers and apparent foreigners, and escorted them to the control stations. Those who had crossed the border illegally either presented themselves at the stations, or were apprehended by local police who conveyed them there. At the control stations the police interrogated their charges as to their purposes in the Reich. Detainees, who intended to remain in the Empire for some time, had to prove financial means and demonstrate legitimate business that warranted a sojourn in Germany. Otherwise, they were deported on the next train that crossed the border. Those stating that they were transmigrants en route to the U.S., England, Canada, or South America were turned over to representatives of the steamship companies.³³

As the proprietors of these checkpoints, both Hapag and Lloyd maintained ticket agencies directly on the premises of the control and registration stations. Their agents examined the transmigrants to see that they had sufficient funds to purchase railroad and steamer

fares for their journeys. Since Hapag and Lloyd operated these concessions, only they sold tickets there. But as a result of the enactment of the Imperial Emigration Law of 1897, all steamship corporations wishing to conduct business in Germany had to register with the government and post bonds. Having given the Imperial government the same securities that the German lines had furnished for their licenses, the foreign companies protested the monopoly Hapag and Lloyd exercised in the control stations. They demanded a foothold in these passenger depots. They accused the German government of introducing the control and registration stations simply to protect German shipping. They complained that at these terminals Hapag and Lloyd not only had cornered the market on new ticket sales, but that they also held extraordinary power over emigrants who had already settled their travel arrangements.³⁴

By the early twentieth century most East European Jewish emigrants arriving at the border control stations had already arranged for their trans-Atlantic passages. The majority of the East European Jews traveled on "prepaids," tickets sent by friends or relatives who had already immigrated to America. In 1899, Gustav Schwab told the Industrial Commission on Immigration that 60 percent of the North German Lloyd's passengers crossed the ocean on prepaids. Philip Cowen, a member of the 1906 U.S. Immigration Commission, estimated that 90 percent of the Russian Jews emigrated with prepaids in hand. If these transmigrants arrived at the border control stations ticketed on either Hapag or Lloyd, they encountered no problems. But if their

prepaids stipulated one of the non-German lines, serious difficulties often ensued. The foreign companies, Red Star, Holland America, Compagnie Generale Transatlantique, White Star, Cunard, and American Lines, had all obtained licenses to conduct business in Germany. These lines, therefore, officially had the right to have their passengers pass through the Reich en route to their ports of embarkation. But these steamship companies discovered that as managers of the control stations, Hapag and Lloyd could place serious obstacles in the path of emigrants bound for their ships.³⁵

For example, emigrants-in-transit, with prepaid passages on foreign lines authorized to conduct business in Germany, could proceed only if they possessed "original prepaids," those made out by one of the company's offices, not by a local sub-agent. At times, however, Hapag and Lloyd used their position of vantage in the control stations to block entirely the transit of any passengers ticketed on non-German ships, even those on lines licensed to operate in Germany. In 1904, as a result of an on-going rivalry between the British Cunard Line and the German companies, transmigrants bound for ports other than Hamburg or Bremen, were not permitted to traverse Germany. When the American Jewish philanthropic organization, the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, sent Alexander Harkavy to Europe to investigate immigrant affairs in 1906, he found that East European Jews, sailing from Rotterdam on the Holland America Line, had to avoid passing through Germany and journey instead via Austria, Switzerland, and Belgium. The German lines hoped that in refusing to admit to

the Reich transmigrants ticketed on non-German ships, they would force such emigrants arriving at the kontrollstationen to exchange their prepaid for passage on either Hapag or Lloyd. Efforts on the part of the foreign lines licensed in Germany to fight the privileged position of Hapag and Lloyd ultimately met with success. By 1908, West European steamship companies, belonging to the pool of lines with concessions to do business in Germany, had gained the right to place their agents at the control and registration stations to oversee the equitable treatment of their passengers and the sale of their tickets.³⁶

This competition between the various shipping lines wreaked havoc in the lives of the individual emigrants held as pawns at the control stations. For when most East European Jews looked at a steamship ticket, they saw a steamship ticket. Heading for America, few East European Jews understood the complex international business arrangements which affected their right to cross the continent via Germany. Only at the kontrollstationen did any difficulty become apparent. Emigrants whose prepaids did not entitle them to traverse Germany could either purchase new tickets or return over the border.³⁷

Even emigrants, whose prepaids entitled them to pass through the Reich, could fall victim to the rivalry between the German companies and their competitors. Steamship ticket agents at the German control and registration stations often proved to be little better than those of Eastern Europe, even though the 1897 Imperial Law on Emigration regulated the activities of all agents operating in Germany. U.S.

Immigration Inspector Maurice Fishberg found that "the emigrant passing through Germany is considered the legitimate prey of the German steamship companies and their agents." At the control stations these agents brought pressure on the transmigrants to switch their previously scheduled routes to favor the German lines.³⁸

In fact, at the control and the registration stations, agents could even force emigrants to alter their final destinations. Knowing that they made little profit in ticketing emigrants to England, the agents at the stations tried to push all emigrants towards America. At Thorn, Fishberg had witnessed one agent's refusal to sell a Warsaw family of six passage to England. The agent gave the emigrants an ultimatum -- deportation or America -- and the presence of a gendarme, all set to carry out the deportation, backed up his demand. Acting under duress, the head of the family and his two sons purchased passage to America, sending his wife and daughters back to Warsaw, since the family could only afford three trans-Atlantic fares.³⁹

Having settled the preliminary matter of their tickets, those emigrants, with passages permitting them to cross Germany en route to America, faced the next hurdle of the kontrollstationen -- an examination to confirm that they met the tests of the U.S. immigration laws. These laws banned the immigration of persons likely to become public charges and of those "afflicted with loathsome or dangerous contagious disease." Strong incentives prompted the German steamship companies to scrutinize the transmigrants at the control stations

carefully. The steamship lines knew that they had to deport at their expense any of their steerage passengers considered unsuitable for immigration by the American authorities. Finding this penalty an inadequate deterrent, in 1903, the U.S. Congress instituted a policy of fining the steamship companies for each attempt to bring a diseased immigrant into the United States. Furthermore, the German authorities held the steamship companies responsible for the repatriation of emigrants returned to the German ports. Therefore, it was greatly to the economic advantage of Hapag and Lloyd as the Central Administrators of the Control Stations to carry out a rigorous inspection of the emigrants-in-transit at the stations. In this way they could avoid incurring expenses connected with the remigration of immigrants rejected, either elsewhere in Germany or at an American port, as unfit for immigration.⁴⁰

Essentially, U.S. legislation required two types of inquiries -- the first to discern the emigrants' pecuniary status and potentiality for self-support, and the second, a medical exam to screen both for infectious diseases and for mental or physical disabilities which would hinder the emigrants from earning a living. In a circular to its agents at the control stations, the North German Lloyd demanded that they reject the following as ineligible for transmigration: "cripples, lame persons, blind persons, idiots, aged feeble persons, persons unable to support themselves, unmarried pregnant females persons afflicted with contagious or loathsome diseases, persons afflicted with diseases of the head, hair, or eyes, whether such

diseases be curable or not." The German government instructed the physicians employed by the Central Administration of the Control Stations to inspect all emigrants for skin itches, smallpox scars, syphilis, favus (a contagious skin disease), herpes, trachoma, diphtheria, deafness, and fevers.⁴¹

However, the degree of rigor employed in the performance of the emigrant inspections seems to have varied greatly. Members of the 1906 Immigration Commission witnessed a number of examinations and reported conflicting views on the exactness of these exams. Commissioners Roman Dobler and Charles Sempsey observed physical exams at Ratibor and Thorn which they found scrupulously performed and where the doctors paid especial attention to the detection of trachoma and favus. Another commissioner described how at the interior control station at Ruhleben the physician examined all emigrants "absolutely nude" in order to detect any physical deformities hidden by clothing. Yet, one wonders if the strictness of these exams reflected awareness of the commissioners' presence, for other reports pictured the examinations in less stringent terms. Philip Cowen termed the inspection at Ruhleben, "a farce." The doctor that he observed there, in what he was told was a "typical" examination, saw three hundred people in twenty minutes. And in 1908, when Anna Herkner disguised herself as a peasant and passed through Myslowitz, she described how all transmigrants filed past the doctor while he briefly looked at their eyes. Opinions also differ as to whether the inspections at the German control stations evaluated the amount of

money possessed by emigrants as a criteria for immigration to America.⁴²

Rejection as unfit to emigrate was a serious matter for the emigrants. During the fiscal year 1906-07, out of 455,916 emigrants passing through the stations, 11,814 or 2.5 percent were barred from immigration as a results of these examinations.⁴³

Having surmounted the obstacles of the exclusionary tests of the agents and the medical exam, the transmigrants had still not crossed over to the "clean side" of the station where they would wait for transportation to the ports. Since the 1892 Hamburg cholera epidemic had convinced the Germans that eastern transmigrants spread infectious bacilli, the authorities did not trust that an examination for obvious diseases fully protected the German populace from any health danger posed by the emigrants-in-transit. In order to reassure German administrators, the steamship companies had furnished an additional security in the sanitary control of those passing through the Reich. The shipping lines had had the control stations outfitted with apparatus for the bathing of these emigrants and the disinfection of their baggage, so that only "clean" transmigrants would travel through Germany.⁴⁴

Mary Antin's depiction of the unpleasant shower bath forced on the emigrants has already been cited. As they prepared to proceed to the "clean side" of the station, the emigrants deposited their luggage at the entrance to the disinfection installation. Then men entered one side of the station while women and children went to the

other. Each corridor housed a dressing room on either side of the shower bath. As the emigrants undressed in the first cubicle, attendants supervised the disinfection of their clothing and then scrubbed them with a special green soap. After the bath the emigrants waited in the second dressing room for the return of their fumigated clothing.⁴⁵

Physicians, conscientious in the performance of their duties, could observe the unclothed bathers as part of their examinations. Less conscientious individuals, in fact, rather unscrupulous agents, could also regard the bathing emigrants. It was not uncommon for agents at the stations to trick the transmigrants, telling them that if they left their money in their clothing during the disinfection process, the steam would destroy the bills. The agents would then watch to see how much money the emigrants clutched in their hands as they entered the showers, hoping to exploit the knowledge of each transmigrant's means to their profit afterwards.⁴⁶

While the emigrants were bathed, their clothes and baggage underwent disinfection. In response to the Russian cholera epidemic of 1892, Walter Wyman, the Surgeon-General of the United States Marine Hospital Service, prohibited the landing of any vessel at an American port whose passengers came from an infected district, unless all personal luggage and clothing had been fumigated. Thus, the disinfection machinery installed at the control stations served the dual purposes of providing Germany with additional sanitary safeguards and of complying with U.S. regulations mandating disinfection for the

baggage of immigrants arriving from unsafe regions. The steam disinfection plant at the control stations handled the fumigation of all emigrant baggage from the unaccompanied male's single change of clothing and talit and tefillin to the entire family's household utensils and feather beds.⁴⁷

Only on occasions of an outbreak of cholera did the U.S. government demand the disinfection of all immigrant baggage from infected areas. At other times, the German authorities left the determination of which emigrants needed to bathe and have their baggage fumigated to the discretion of the inspecting physicians at the control stations. Such measures particularly affected the Russians, of whom the majority were Jews. For example, when Anna Herkner pretended to be a Bohemian peasant at Myslowitz, she found that only Russian Jews had their clothing and baggage disinfected. But as Consul Robert P. Skinner reported, except when the U.S. mandated these measures, obligatory bathing and disinfection were laxly enforced, because Russian Jews, objecting to the harsh treatment, could take other routes to avoid the unpleasanteries forced on them at the control stations.⁴⁸

All emigrants, ordered to bath and to have their baggage disinfected, had to pay two marks the equivalent of fifty cents, for these "services." Then those approved for transmigration across Germany waited on the "clean" side of the control stations for the departure of the trains to the port cities. In the first years of the operation of the stations, only Eydtkuhnen forwarded transmigrants daily. Thus, most emigrants-in-transit spent several days waiting

for a train. Although the interim passed in the terminals shortened considerably in later years, transmigrants still encountered a twenty-four hour delay at most control stations.⁴⁹

All travelers know the boredom and inconvenience of biding time in waiting rooms, and the emigrants-in-transit were clearly no exception to this rule. Nevertheless, the degree of discomfort experienced in the delay at the control stations very much depended upon the accommodations provided. The reports of Immigration Commissioners Dobler and Sempsey corroborated the contention of North German Lloyd's New York agent, Gustav Schwab, that the control stations accorded the emigrants excellent facilities. Having inspected the stations at Ratibor and Thorn, these Commissioners concluded that the stations offered "a group of one and two story buildings with large, well ventilated sitting rooms and dormitories, supplied with good clean beds; so that emigrants detained here are furnished the best of accommodations." Another investigator similarly praised the interior control station Ruhleben, where all transmigrants briefly stopped for a second inspection aimed primarily at those who had circumvented the initial one at the border.⁵⁰

However, not all the control stations measured up to the facilities of Ratibor and Thorn. In 1911, Consul Robert P. Skinner reported in some detail on the system of the control and registration stations. While he affirmed that some of the newer stations offered good accommodations, Skinner saw that others were dilapidated and ill-equipped. The building at Ottlotschin lacked dormitories,

forcing the emigrants to sleep on the floor. And the only good thing Skinner could say about the depot at Posen, was that a new structure was being built nearby.⁵¹

Anna Herkner's description of the station at Myslowitz provides another perspective on the experiences of the transmigrants in the control stations. Surely, her detailed report on the conditions of her voyage as an emigrant remains invaluable for the wealth of information that she collected as an emigrant-in-transit. In 1908, Miss Herkner passed through Myslowitz disguised as a Bohemian peasant. Located at the junction of Germany, Russia, and Austria, Myslowitz was considered one of the most important stations with a heavy volume of traffic from Russian and Galician Jews. No emigrant entering the station could leave of his or her own accord. The emigrants remained locked in the station until a special train for transmigrants arrived or until a gendarme escorted the deportees to the trains returning over the border.⁵²

At Myslowitz, the emigrants stopped in a steam heated, electrically lighted, well ventilated hall. But the comforts afforded by these accommodations went no further. Miss Herkner saw no dormitory. Instead emigrants slept on benches lining the walls of the waiting room or on their baggage on the floor. Men, women, and children huddled together. Vermin crawled on the walls. The toilets and washrooms in the yard were grossly insufficient for the number of people detained.⁵³

Held captive in the station, the emigrants ate what they had packed for their journey or what they could buy at the canteen. Although the menu of the snack bar listed a variety of foods and beverages, Miss Herkner noticed that it sold mostly beer, wine, whiskey, and tobacco. She could not buy any tea or coffee from the canteen keeper. Prices charged at the buffet were exorbitant, far beyond the means of the average emigrants. And on top of this, the canteen keeper notoriously shortchanged his customers.⁵⁴

Miss Herkner discovered that the attendants, whom Schwab had praised as "competent," were all intoxicated. And she concluded that the control stations, which Schwab had described as "completely equipped for the comfort and convenience" of the emigrants-in-transit, "could not rightly be called accommodations."⁵⁵

The emigrants-in-transit could leave the stations only when a train, designated exclusively for their conveyance, arrived. The German authorities permitted only those transmigrants in possession of four hundred marks in addition to their steamship and railroad tickets to travel unescorted through the Reich. All others, the vast majority of emigrants crossing Germany, rode on board these special emigrant trains or on railroad cars, set aside for their use and attached to regular passenger trains. By 1881, long before the establishment of the kontrollstationen, these emigrant trains ran from the frontier railroad terminals to the port cities, and they continued to operate throughout this entire period of migration.⁵⁶

Although the train ride from the border to the German ports of Hamburg and Bremen should have taken a single day and night, many emigrants spent nearly two days in transit, traveling twenty-four hours to reach the Berlin checkpoint and another twenty-four hours from there to a port. The conditions on board these trains were exceedingly bad. Every immigrant memoir that described the journey by rail depicted the severe overcrowding. Most emigrants traveled in a kind of box car, many of which posted a placard proclaiming, "For 8 horses or 40 men." These cars had no seats. Only a few windows allowed for ventilation. Jamming the emigrants into such quarters produced a stifling atmosphere. Some fortunate transmigrants did travel in third class coaches equipped with wooden seats, but again gross overcrowding made for a miserable trip. Although the Germans tried to isolate the Jews in separate railroad cars, such segregation was not rigidly enforced.⁵⁷

Mary Antin's depiction of her voyage, while colorfully written, in no way exaggerates the distress of the emigrants-in-transit on board these trains. Her journey to the port of Hamburg took two days. She remembered the first stage of her trip:

It became so terrible that all glared madly at the conductor as he allowed more people to come into that prison, and trembled at the announcement of every station.

And when the Antin family reboarded their train after their disinfestation at the Berlin station, she recalled,

If we had borne great discomforts on the night before, we were suffering now. I had thought anything worse impossible. Worse it was now.

The car was even more crowded, and people gasped for breath. People sat in strangers' laps, only glad of that. The floor was so thickly lined that the conductor could not pass . . . Tonight all were more worn out . . . They could not help falling asleep and colliding with someone's nodding head which called out angry mutterings . . . Some fell off their seats.⁵⁸

The discomforts the emigrants bore were aggravated by their forced confinement at most stops. Hunger and thirst plagued these travelers. At some stations philanthropic organizations passed food through the windows of the emigrant cars. At those stations where the emigrants were permitted to debark briefly, they all rushed to the water pump to snatch a drink. Those transmigrants in cars attached to regular trains could purchase sandwiches from the concessionaire, but the prices here, like those in the control stations, were exorbitant and well beyond the purse of most emigrants.⁵⁹

German Jewry did what it could to aid its East European co-religionists passing through the Reich and to mitigate the severities that resulted from the strict governmental control of these emigrants-in-transit. When the first wave of Russian Jews fled to Germany in 1868, German Jews responded on an ad hoc basis to feed, clothe, and shelter the refugees until they moved on to points further west. These early endeavors to alleviate the plight of the East European Jewish emigrants marked the beginning of a major German Jewish philanthropic effort that would ultimately grow to enormous dimensions. During the years 1868-1914, German Jews established an array of local committees, provincial societies, national organizations, and transnational associations to deal with this migration. A complete study

of German Jewry's activity on behalf of these emigrants rightfully belongs as part of a larger history of Jewish philanthropy and its role in assisting the "Great Migration." The discussion that follows focuses, however, only on the major German Jewish benevolent organizations and the kinds of assistance they rendered to the emigrants-in-transit.⁶⁰

Essentially, Jewish philanthropy manifested two tendencies when dealing with the East European Jewish migration. The first of these was an effort to control the exodus, to select those candidates suitable for transplanting, and to decide where they should resettle. Only those individuals, meeting the criteria set for immigration by the charitable societies, were entitled to receive assistance in arranging their transportation. The major Jewish philanthropies of France, Germany, England, and America had simply assumed that they could discourage all others from attempting embarkation by withholding the promise of any support. Such schemes for a grand organization of the movement of the East European Jews fell far short of the reality -- as these Jewish communities eventually realized. The exodus of the Jews from Eastern Europe was a spontaneous migration independent of the aid and direction of the Jewish philanthropies. By the first decade of the twentieth century, German Jewry, at least, had come to grips with this reality. While attempts to channel this migration did not cease entirely, German Jewish philanthropy now emphasized assisting all Jewish emigrants, especially those in transit through the Reich, to reach their destinations safely.⁶¹

The first wave of Russian Jewish emigration, in 1868, sparked the Jewish communities along the Prussian border to institute emergency relief measures. As immigration continued in 1869, meetings took place between the leaders of the German Jewish communities and members of the Central Committee of the major Franco-Jewish philanthropic organization, the Alliance Israelite Universelle, concerning the problems of this Russian Jewish migration. These discussions led to the formation of a Koenigsberg relief committee under the guidance of the Alliance, whose tasks included the organization of the Russian Jewish migration, the selection of healthy and industrious individuals fit for embarkation, and the arranging of their transportation with the steamship companies. By June of 1870, one thousand families had applied to this committee for assistance. Of these, the society managed to dispatch fifth-five westward. Already the numbers of Jews determined to flee Imperial Russia had far exceeded the capacity of the institutions established by Western Jewry to direct this migration. Of the estimated 40,000 Russian Jews settling in the United States in the 1870's, only a tiny fraction benefitted from the guidance of this and similar Western Jewish societies. Although it was by no means fully evident to European Jewish leaders in the 1870's, having laid the groundwork for organized migration, they had also inadvertently stimulated a much larger unorganized one.⁶²

That French and German Jewish efforts to organize the East European Jewish migration touched off large scale unorganized

migration became apparent following the pogroms of 1881. The Alliance Israelite Universelle had acted to assist the large numbers of impoverished refugees who had fled to Brody, Austria in the wake of the violence. When the Alliance sent its representative Charles Netter to Brody to oversee transportation arrangements for these emigrants, word spread. By 1882, the number of Russian Jews in Brody had swelled to 24,000. The Alliance responded by demanding the repatriation of this second wave of Russian Jews. Although it met great difficulty in its efforts to return these Jews to Russia, this program did check the influx into Brody. By January 1883, the Alliance had completed its work there. The experience of the Alliance in Brody raised the spectre that assisted emigration encouraged massive migration. Although the Alliance had tried to undo its program of organized emigration with a program of organized re-migration, its efforts to discourage the movement of Russian Jews did not stem the tide. Between 1881 and 1882, 13,500 Russian Jews immigrated to the United States, many of them with the help of the Alliance. But from 1883, when the Alliance had ceased to sponsor emigrants, to the end of the decade, another 90,000 Russian Jews landed in the U.S.⁶³

The expulsion of Moscow's Jews, in March of 1891, doubled the number of Russian Jews heading for America and led to a sharp rise in the wave of emigrants-in-transit through Germany. Fearing a repetition of the events that had occurred in Brody, where assistance to those fleeing the pogroms had sparked a second stream of migration,

Western Jewish philanthropic societies, including the Alliance, had at first refused to help the victims of the Moscow deportations. But reality impinged. In the Charlottenburg suburb of Berlin, where the emigrant trains stopped for a six hour layover, the exiles debarked en masse. Charlottenburg Jews responded to the influx of refugees by creating a committee to aid the expatriates with food, medical advice and, if necessary, steamer tickets. This committee soon found itself overwhelmed by the task of handling up to five hundred transmigrants per day, and it turned to its co-religionists for help in meeting the needs of these exiles. In June of 1891, German Jews founded the Deutsches Central-Komitee fur die russischen Juden to select emigrants suitable for resettlement, to arrange for their transportation, and to coordinate relief activities throughout Germany.⁶⁴

The work of the DCK in establishing border committees to direct and assist Jewish migration has already been discussed in conjunction with the development of the German control of the emigrants-in-transit. In conformity with the notions of organized migration pioneered by the Alliance at Brody in 1882, the DCK determined to help only those it deemed fit for emigration, and it endeavored to repatriate all others. Dr. Heinrich M. Cohn, a member of the Board of Directors of the DCK, indicated that fear of encouraging emigration had until then prevented the formation of an association operating on such a large scale. But the exigencies of 1891, and the wretched plight of those driven from their homes had compelled German Jews to act "for common

humanity's sake." While Dr. Cohn hoped that the DCK would serve only those caught in the recent persecutions, he doubted that the society could so restrict its sphere of operations. The DCK continued to coordinate relief and transportation arrangements for the emigrants it had agreed to sponsor until November of 1896, when it reported that Russian Jewish migration had completely stopped. In January of 1898, the Deutsches Central-Komitee fur die russischen Juden dissolved itself.⁶⁵

Since 33,000 Russian Jews had immigrated to the United States in 1896 and 1897, it can hardly be claimed that Russian Jewish migration had ended. A more likely explanation for the cessation of activity on the part of the DCK lies with the establishment of the border control stations. By January 1898, the German authorities had completed the series of border depots lining the Russian frontier. These stations had assumed many of the functions of the DCK, especially the arranging for the emigrants' transport through the Reich. The German government had ordered all emigrants-in-transit to proceed through these checkpoints, and the Central Administration of the Control Stations supervised the dispatching of the transmigrants from there to the ports. It seemed, therefore, as if the work of the DCK in forwarding Jewish emigrants had become superfluous. Although the DCK might have continued its support in providing food and clothing, medical and legal advice to Jewish emigrants-in-transit, its policy of assisting primarily craftsmen and agriculturalists gave it a limited sphere for its activities. Since the control stations

permitted all properly ticketed individuals, meeting the tests of foreign immigration laws, to pass through the Reich, they essentially thwarted the efforts of the DCK to confine the Russian Jewish migration to those capable of self-support. The building of additional border control stations at Tilsit, Insterburg, and Thorn, in 1896 and 1897, had tightened the system of the control stations, so that they effectively handled the vast majority of emigrants-in-transit. Shortly thereafter, the DCK ceased operations.⁶⁶

The dissolution of the DCK left German Jewry without a national body coordinating the aid to the Jewish emigrants-in-transit. That gap was filled in May of 1901, partly in response to the wave of Roumanian Jewish migration, when German Jewry created its own central aid organization, the Hilfsverein der Deutschen Juden. The Hilfsverein planned "to further the moral, spiritual, and economic development" of world Jewry, to regulate all phases of the voyage for the Jewish transmigrants, and to cooperate with similar philanthropic associations run by the French, British, and Austrian Jews. In December of 1904, the Hilfsverein delegated responsibility for the Jewish travelers to a separate branch, the Zentralbureaus fur Judische Auswanderungsangelegenheiten (ZJA).⁶⁷

The ZJA supported and coordinated a wide range of activities designed both to channel the migration and to ease the path of all Jewish emigrants-in-transit through Germany. A discussion of the programs sponsored by the ZJA for these exiles sheds some light on the ways in which German Jewry unselfishly aided their less fortunate

co-religionists. It also substantiates the suggestion, advanced by Wertheimer in his dissertation, that such assistance did not simply grow out of German Jewry's desire to get rid of the refugees, but rather that it evolved, at least partially, from sincere humanitarian motives to ameliorate the difficulties of the journey for the transmigrants.⁶⁸

The ZJA served the emigrants-in-transit by furnishing information on travel arrangements, by negotiating with other parties concerned with the migration, and by providing direct assistance to the emigrants-in-transit. It disseminated publications to enlighten those considering resettlement. These brochures and bulletins covered such topics as the laws of the lands of immigration, regulations for transmigration, how to begin the journey, the purchase of tickets, the competing steamship lines, instructions for crossing the border, the railroad trip, accommodations in the ports and on board the ships, and sources for further assistance. In addition, the ZJA distributed language books that translated useful phrases from Yiddish into English and, for those bound for South America, into Spanish. Finally, this organization replied to all direct inquiries for specific information, corresponding in more than six languages with both Jews and non-Jews.⁶⁹

The ZJA also assumed the role of the official German Jewish organization representing the transmigrants. As such, it served as a liaison to numerous public and private boards concerned with the population transfer. The ZJA maintained contacts with those branches

of the governments of the United States, Canada, Cuba, Holland, Belgium, Austria, Switzerland, and England dealing with the immigrants. In Germany alone, it negotiated with the Prussian and Saxony Ministries of the Interior, the Royal Railroad Directors of Berlin and Bromberg, and the Central Information Office for German Emigration. This agency also conferred with private philanthropic societies, including the major Jewish aid organizations of Europe and America regarding the expatriates. And, in one of its most impressive achievements, the ZJA's discussions with the German steamship companies resulted not only in the stationing of Jewish representatives in the control and registration stations, but also in the introduction of a discount fare for Jewish steerage passengers that saved an estimated 485,000 marks in three years.⁷⁰

But, the ZJA did not confine itself to work on behalf of these travelers. It also rendered direct assistance to the emigrants who encountered difficulties in transit. The ZJA aided those whose funds ran out in the midst of their journeys. It furnished guarantees for some passengers whom the steamship companies hesitated to board, but whom ZJA officials believed fully qualified for migration. Emigrants, stranded by steamer tickets that did not permit transmigration through Germany or by counterfeit prepaid tickets, received assistance from the ZJA's trusted agents. The bureau maintained a medical staff to nurse those ill with favus or trachoma back to health. Rejected emigrants whom the ZJA could not assist, it repatriated. This organization even tracked down baggage that had gone astray.⁷¹

To smooth the actual journey of the emigrants-in-transit through the Reich, the ZJA also established programs to shelter, clothe, and feed these travelers. The bureau built a number of hostels for the lodging of Jewish exiles. The largest of these, located at Koenigsberg had fourteen rooms and was equipped with bathing and disinfection apparatus and three kitchens. Women and children boarded at these inns while waiting to receive tickets or additional funds from family, or to restore their health before proceeding on to the ports of embarkation. In order to make certain that the emigrants had warm garments for the cold nights at sea, the ZJA's women's branches collected and distributed clothing.⁷²

The ZJA aided the greatest number of transmigrants with its provision of kosher food. Its committees at the railroad depots, Ruhleben control station, and in the German ports offered a warm, kosher meal to all Jewish emigrants, and often to many non-Jews as well. For those traveling on to Rotterdam or Antwerp via Germany, the ZJA made special arrangements to insure a supply of kosher food. And the ZJA even succeeded in persuading the German lines to serve kosher food on board their ships. That this program, in particular, affected large numbers of Jewish emigrants is clear. In 1906, 132,000 Jewish transmigrants passed through Germany. The ZJA claimed to have assisted 83,544 of these, curing health problems for 2,265 answering the inquiries of 8,200 persons, handling various insundry problems for 12,328 travelers, and feeding the remaining 60,751 people. Of the 94,000 Jewish transmigrants in Germany in 1907, the

ZJA rendered some type of assistance to 55,000.⁷³

The development of German Jewry's assistance to the emigrants-in-transit grew slowly from the first ad hoc local committees in the late 1860's to the national coordinating body, the Zentralbureau fur Judische Auswanderungsangelegenheiten, founded in late 1904, by the Hilfsverein der Deutschen Juden. In the intervening thirty-five years, while individual German Jews, local communities, and provincial committees offered a measure of relief to impoverished travelers who came their way, the Deutsches Central-Komitee fur die russischen Juden operated on a wider scale to coordinate aid for the travelers. But this organization tried, as did those central aid associations of other Western Jewries, notably the Alliance, to control and direct the migration, repatriating those East European Jews it deemed unsuited for resettlement. By the beginning of the twentieth century, however, German Jewry perceived, first as a result of the Roumanian Jewish exodus and then in the wake of a new wave of disastrous pogroms in Russia in 1903-05, that such migration was neither a passing phenomena nor one that could be controlled. The Jews of Germany responded, as the country through which the majority of the East European Jews passed in transit, with the founding of the ZJA to coordinate on a grand scale aid to all travelers.

While the ZJA continued some of the old emigration strategies set by Jewish philanthropies in the nineteenth century, its creation represented a break with the past. The committees of the ZJA reportedly did continue a long standing Jewish philanthropies' policy of

discouraging migration, although evidently from the numbers of emigrants-in-transit that they aided, they had little success in this endeavor. And the ZJA still tried to direct the migration as evidenced by its negotiations with the North German Lloyd Line in 1906, to ship Jewish emigrants from Bremen directly to Galveston, Texas as part of a plan, promoted by the American-Jewish banker Jacob Schiff, to alleviate the overcrowding of Jewish immigrants on the eastern seaboard. But the creation of the ZJA marked a significant turning point for German Jewish philanthropy. It demonstrated German Jewry's full acceptance of the spontaneous nature of the migration, and it broke with the program, seen in Germany with the DCK, of assisting only those considered particularly well qualified to begin anew elsewhere. The range of services provided by the ZJA for the emigrants-in-transit demonstrated a recognition of the reality of the mass migration and revealed a determination to aid in whatever ways possible all Jewish emigrants fleeing the poverty and persecutions of Eastern Europe.⁷⁴

Only the most cynical historian, when confronted with the massive evidence of the extent of the activities supported and coordinated by the ZJA and funded by the Hilfsverein, could claim that this outpouring of generosity stemmed solely from the desire of the Jews of Germany to push the East European Jews beyond their borders. That was the expressed intention of the German authorities. German Jewry, therefore, had to comply with the interests of its government in this matter. With the building of the control and registration

stations in 1894, Germany had created its own mechanism for the complete, if crude, handling of the emigrants-in-transit from border to port. German Jews could have left their East European co-religionists to the care of these institutions. That they did not can be attributed to the complex factors that motivated German Jewry. While some German Jewish philanthropy stemmed from a desire to speed the refugees on their way or to ward off rising anti-Semitism by handling the problems of Jewish transmigrants internally, the generosity of the German Jews -- including their efforts to negotiate with the government and emigration businesses on behalf of the Jewish emigrants -- suggests that humanitarian motives sparked German Jewry to aid the East European Jewish emigrants-in-transit through the Reich.⁷⁵

While, especially in the last decade of migration prior to World War I, German Jews worked tirelessly to mitigate the severities of all East European Jewish emigrants-in-transit, they faced an enormous task. The overcrowding and discomforts endured in the passage through the control stations and the journey by rail, produced terrific strains. In 1906, one of the U.S. immigration commissioners reported that he had actually seen people collapse at the German ports from the stresses of their trip. Although German Jewish philanthropy did what it could to ease the emigrants' path -- certainly observant Jews must have welcomed the supplying of kosher food -- still it could do little to ameliorate the rigidity of the German control of the emigrants-in-transit. After all, such treatment was designed,

not only to regulate all phases of the migration, to isolate the transmigrants and to protect Germany and its citizens in so doing, but also to make certain that none of these transmigrants became unwanted immigrants.⁷⁶

Can the severities and indignities encountered by the emigrants-in-transit -- the harsh treatment at the control stations, the forced bathing and disinfection focused often only upon the Jews, the exploitation, and the horrors of a train journey that surely set the standards for the grotesqueries of a later era -- simply be seen as the result of the difficulties of dealing with such numbers? Or did the harshness of the German control of the emigrants-in-transit stem, at least partially, from German administrators' anti-Semitism and their determination to dissuade the Jewish transmigrants from settling in the Reich? The rough handling meted out by gendarmes, agents, attendants, doctors, and railroad officials, left the East European Jews with a definite opinion of Germany's attitude toward their presence. As Benjamin Laikin, formerly of Pobolov, recognized in Berlin in 1914, "We were led through fenced-in alleys to prevent us from desecrating the sacred soil of the German capital with our Jewish boots." The measures taken by the German authorities for the inspection, sanitization, isolation, and dispatching of the transmigrants, bore out Laikin's impression that German authorities merely tolerated his presence, only for as long as necessary to reach the port of embarkation. Making the passage through Germany unpleasant surely was one way of discouraging Jewish immigration. For, by the

time the East European Jews had crossed Germany, not only had they had no opportunity to settle there, but they had no desire ever to do so.⁷⁷

NOTES

- 1 Jack L. Wertheimer, "German Policy and Jewish Politics: The Absorption of the East European Jews in Germany, 1868-1914." Dissertation, Columbia University (1978), p. 42; Hilfsvereins der Deutschen Juden, Achter Geschäftsbericht, 1909 (Berlin, 1910), p. 126; Leon Sklarz, "Geschichte und Organisation der Ostjudenhilfe in Deutschland seit dem Jahre 1914." Diss. University of Berlin (1927), p. 70; United States, Department of Labor, Bureau of Immigration, Annual Report of the Commissioner General of Immigration for Fiscal 1912-13 (ARCGI) (Washington, D.C., 1914), p. 104; On forwarding emigrants to Liverpool via Hamburg, see Lamar Cecil, Albert Ballin: Business and Politics in Imperial Germany, 1888-1918 (Princeton, New Jersey, 1967), p. 13; Irving Howe delineated four major routes of Jewish migration. Three of these crossed Germany, World of Our Fathers (New York, 1976), p. 28.
- 2 National Archives, Record Group 85, 51411/56, Report of Philip Cowen, 31 January 1907, pp. 30-35; Wertheimer, p. 300.
- 3 U.S., 52nd Congress, 1st session, 1892. House Executive Document 235, Part I (serial 2957): Enforcement of Alien Contract Labor Laws, p. 257; On the profitability of the steerage trade, see U.S., 43rd Cong., 1st sess., 1874. Senate Exec. Doc. 23 (serial 1580): Steerage Passengers on Emigrant Vessels, pp. 121, 149; Broughton Brandenburg, Imported Americans (New York, 1904), pp. 175-76; U.S., 57th Cong., 1st sess., 1901. H. Doc. 184 (serial 4345): Reports of the Industrial Commission on Immigration, p. xc.
- 4 Wertheimer, p. 301.
- 5 Wertheimer makes a persuasive argument for dating the start of the mass migration to the winter of 1868-69, pp. 1, 13; Salo W. Baron, The Russian Jew Under Tsars and Soviets (New York, 1964), pp. 87-88; Bernhard Kahn, "Die Judische Auswanderung," Ost und West (July-Aug., 1905), 458-59; Citation, Howe, p. 6.

- 6 On the relationship between the steerage traffic and the growth of Germany as a maritime power, see John Malcolm Brinnen, The Sway of the Grand Saloon (New York, 1971), pp. 305-405, especially pp. 239-40, 310-14; On the German government subsidies, see "English vs. German Atlantic Liners," Scientific American, 22 Sept. 1900, p. 179.
- 7 The available figures dispute Wertheimer's suggestion that Eastern Jewish transmigrants represented "around half" the steerage passengers on German ships, p. 42; The figures are compiled from NA, RG 59, Numerical and Minor Files of the Dept. of State, 12044, Report of Consul E. Theophilus Liefeld, 7 Feb. 1908; Erster Jahresbericht (1905) des Zentralbureaus fur Judische Auswanderungsangelegenheiten (Berlin, 1906), pp. 7-8; Zweiter Jahresbericht (1906), pp. 14-16; Sklarz, p. 70; Annual Report of the Commissioner General of Immigration for Fiscal 1912-13, p. 104.
- 8 Fears of a massive influx of Eastern Jews prompted the Reichstag in 1893, 1894, and 1895 to consider bills to prohibit Eastern Jewish immigration. None of these, however, passed. See, Richard Simon Levy, "Anti-Semitic Political Parties in the German Empire." Diss. Yale Univ. (1969), pp. 153, 240; Egmont Zechlin, Die deutsche Politik und die Juden im Ersten Weltkrieg (Gottingen, 1969), pp. 160-61; Wertheimer, especially pp. 86-87, 188-89; Wlad W. Kaplun-Kogan, Die Judischen Wanderbewegungen in der neusten Zeit (1880-1914) (Bonn: 1919), p. 19.
- 9 Little work has appeared on the transmigrants in Germany. Wertheimer briefly mentioned the subject and suggested the need for further study, pp. 300-304. Perhaps the most frequently cited article is that of Zosa Szajkowski, "Sufferings of Jewish Emigrants to America in Transit through Germany," Jewish Social Studies, 39 (1977), pp. 105-116. Some material appears in Mark Wischnitzer, To Dwell in Safety: The Story of Jewish Migration Since 1800 (Philadelphia, 1948), chapter 4. A rather neglected work is that of Bernard Karlsberg, The History and Importance of the German Control of the Emigrants-in-transit, trans. by A. van Weely and L. Schunemann (Hamburg, 1922). Karlsberg has considered the topic from the point of view of German business and political history, but his text lacks sufficient documentation.
- 10 Wertheimer, pp. 94-101; The order of the German Minister of the Interior of 3 April 1895 justified the establishment

of the border control stations designed to contain the transmigrants as a measure necessary "to prevent the overburdening of the German institutions for the poor with such alien immigrants." translated in U.S. Treasury Department, Immigration Service, ARCGI for Fiscal 1894-95, Document No. 1807 (Washington, D.C., 1895), p. 13.

11 Kahn, pp. 475, 480.

12 Allgemeine Zeitung des Judentums (AZJ) 8 November 1881, pp. 738-40; AZJ 27 June 1882, pp. 428-29; Wertheimer, p. 43; AZJ 13 June 1882, p. 391.

13 Bernard Horwich, My First Eighty Years (Chicago, 1939), p. 106.

14 AZJ 6 June 1882, pp. 375-76; Wertheimer, p. 97.

15 Karlsberg, pp. 10-15, 38-39, 137; Kahn, pp. 473-74; Immigration Act of 1882, chapter 376, section 2, 22 United States Statutes at Large 214; For a fuller discussion of restrictive U.S. immigration legislation, see supra., pp. 24-25.

16 From 1881 to 1894, Russian Jews comprised significantly more than fifty percent of all Russian emigrants, peaking in 1891 at 91.6 percent. While from 1895 to 1910, Russian Jewish emigration often comprised less than 50 percent of all Russian emigrants, the ratio of Russian Jewish emigrants to Russian emigrants never dipped below 32.1 percent. Samuel Joseph, Jewish Immigration to the United States from 1881-1910 (1914), rpt. Columbia University Studies in History, Economics and Public Law, Vol. LIX (New York, 1967), p. 164. Since Russian Jews comprised such a significant segment of the total Russian emigration, measures taken by the Prussian authorities to control the migration on their eastern frontier can be viewed as aimed largely at these Jews, whose immigration the German authorities considered particularly undesirable.

17 Karlsberg, pp. 16-25.

18 Archives, Leo Baeck Institute, (ALBI) Emigration Collection 1864-1952, nos. 10, 11, Deutsches Central-Komitee fur die Russischen Juden, Circulars (1891); ALBI, Emigration Collection, 1881-1914, no. 19, DCK, "Die Organisation in Ostpreussen und Oberschlesien"; Karlsberg, pp. 38-41; Sklarz, p. 31; Kahn, pp. 475-76; Wischnitzer, pp. 70-75.

- 19 Karlsberg, pp. 18, 21, 23-31, 34; H. Exec. Doc. 235 (serial 2957): p. 102.
- 20 Karlsberg, pp. 44-48; Cecil, p. 40; Wertheimer, pp. 97-98.
- 21 Joseph, p. 164, Karlsberg, pp. 54-56.
- 22 Joseph, p. 164.
- 23 Arnold Petzet, Heinrich Wiegand: ein Lebensbild (Bremen, 1932), pp. 37-38; Ludwig Beutin, Bremen und Amerika: Zur Geschichte der Weltwirtschaft und der Beziehungen Deutschlands zu den Vereinigten Staaten (Bremen, 1953), p. 160; Karlsberg, pp. 45, 54, 57; Skalrz, p. 31; Kahn, pp. 475-76.
- 24 Petzet, p. 37; Karlsberg, p. 60; Wertheimer reported the resolution of the Hamburg Senate; p. 98.
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- 58 Antin, From Plotz. . ., pp. 38, 44.
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- 60 On the development of the German Jewish philanthropic organizations, see Wischnitzer, ch. 1 - 4; ALBI, Zosa Szajkowski, "Diplomatic Activities of German Jews. Book One: From 1860 until World War I," manuscript; Wertheimer, pp. 304-07; on the work of the Deutsch-Israelitischen Gemeindebundes, see Jacob Segall, "Geschichte und Organisation der jüdischen Wanderarmenfürsorge in Deutschland bis zum Jahre 1914," Zeitschrift für Demographie und Statistik, Heft 3 - 4 (Mai-Juli 1924), pp. 57-74. In studying German Jewish efforts to assist the East European Jewish migration, historians must also recognize the role played by individual humanitarians. See, e.g., Antin, From Plotzk. . ., pp. 26-35.

- 61 On the spontaneous nature of this migration, see ALBI, Szajkowski manu., pp. 431-33.
- 62 ALBI, Szajkowski manu., pp. 262-79.
- 63 ALBI, Szajkowski manu., pp. 288-306; Joseph, p. 93.
- 64 Joseph, p. 93; ALBI, Szajkowski manu., pp. 317-20; H. Exec. Doc. 235 (serial 2957): pp. 22-27; ALBI, Emigration Collection 1864-1952, nos. 10, 11; ALBI, Emigration Collection, 1881-1914, no. 19.
- 65 supra., pp.96-97; 102-03; Deutsches Central-Komitée für die russischen Juden, Berichts (1891-92), "Instruction für die Beförderung" (1892); H. Exec. Doc. 235 (serial 2957), pp. 22-27; ALBI, Szajkowski manu., p. 330.
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- 68 On the role of the ZJA in arranging to send Eastern Jews to Galveston, Texas, see Dritter Jahresbericht des Zentralbureaus für Judische Auswanderungsangelegenheiten, 1907 (Berlin, 1908), pp. 9-10; Wertheimer, pp. 306-07.
- 69 Erster Jahresbericht des ZJA, 1905, pp. 8-10. A copy of the ZJA's phrasebook has been preserved in the National Archives. NA, RG 85, 51411/29, Kurzgefasstes Wörterbuch für Englisch und Judisch (Berlin, 1906).
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- 74 ALBI, Szajkowski manu., p. 453.
- 75 For Wertheimer's revisionist suggestion, see pp. 306-07, especially note 8.
- 76 NA, RG 85, 51411/54, p. 29.
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Chapter IV

The Land Arrangements: The Port Cities

Having struck a bargain with a legitimate ticket agent and having endured the rigors of traveling via Germany, the East European Jews' next stop on the way to America was the sojourn at the seaport. For most Jewish emigrants this meant waiting in Hamburg or Bremen for the departure of one of the giant steamships of the Hamburg-America (Hapag) or North German Lloyd (Lloyd) Lines. But significant numbers of Jewish emigrants bypassed these German cities and set sail from other harbors -- especially Libau and Liverpool.

Russian Jews, who had managed to purchase legitimate passports granting them the right to travel abroad for a period of time, could openly embark from any of the Russian ports -- Odessa, St. Petersburg, Riga, or Libau. Of these, the most important port for Jewish emigration was Libau, a commercial harbor on the Baltic Sea situated just south of Riga, with a population of 80,000 including some 15,000 Jews. Until 1906, passengers from Libau could sail only as far as England, usually landing at Hull or London. Those desiring to emigrate overseas would then take a train to Liverpool and cross the Atlantic from there in one of the English steamships.¹

But in June 1906, the Russian Ministry of Trade and Industry convened a conference of steamship companies and other organizations interested in emigration as part of an effort to encourage migration via Russian ports. At the same time an inter-ministerial commission

began drafting a new law regulating emigration, so that Russia, too, could profit from the lucrative business, dominated by the German and English shipping companies, of transporting emigrant steerage passengers. However, conflict between the Ministry of the Interior and that of Trade and Industry postponed the adoption of any such bill. In 1914, a proposal finally reached the Council of Ministers, but the Duma never considered it.²

In spite of the fact that no new emigration law had emerged, Russian trade officials began acting as if a law sanctioning emigration from the Empire had passed. In July 1906, the government permitted the Russian Volunteer Fleet to open a direct route from Libau to America. Three months later another trans-Atlantic line began operating, this time from the Black Sea port Odessa. In order to encourage emigrants to travel on these ships, the government granted concessions, expediting the issuance of passports and offering cheap railroad fares to the seaports for those booked on Russian vessels. Despite these inducements only Libau proved a viable port for direct service to America, partly because the twenty-eight days required for the voyage from Odessa to America was considered unreasonably long for the era of steamships.³

Although emigration from Russia remained technically illegal, in 1907, a representative from the Ministry of Trade and Industry and the chief of the Russian Merchant Marine approached William P. Dillingham, head of the U.S. Immigration Commission that bore his name, with a plan to promote emigration via Russian ports. The

Russians asked Dillingham to lay before the Senate a proposal to amend the U.S. Immigration Act of 1907 to require all immigrants to arrive on vessels of their own nationality. The Russian government promised the U.S. an unspecified "equivalent in exchange" for this favor. Although correspondence indicates that Russian officials still tried to advance this scheme as late as 1910, it does not seem ever to have received serious consideration.⁴

Still, emigration via Libau grew. While the Russian American Line carried some passengers directly to the U.S., most emigrants continued to prefer the shorter three day journey from Libau to England and transmigration through that country. For Jews holding legitimate passports, embarkation from Libau offered a number of advantages. Its proximity to the Pale of Settlement meant that emigrants endured a shorter train ride to this port than to points further west. Passengers, therefore, arrived at the ship in somewhat better physical shape as a result of the briefer journey. Russian Jews preferred Libau because they could avoid the indignities of the bath and disinfection mandated at the German control stations. And emigrants embarking at Libau destined for the U.S. reportedly encountered a less stringent physical exam than at other ports. However, the medical examination did become stricter in the years preceding the outbreak of World War I.⁵

While the port of Libau offered Jewish emigrants relatively easy accessibility and convenience, poor accommodations in the port itself and often wretched conditions on board Libau ships offset

some of the advantages of a departure from the Baltic Sea port. Because of the equivocal nature of the Russian policy on emigration, the accommodations offered emigrants in Libau lacked both the protectionist and restrictive environment found in those maintained in other port cities. Although emigrants complained about the bug-infested lodging houses, they could freely move about the city during the two or three days they spent there prior to boarding ship.⁶

But many Russian Jewish emigrants, in fact most, did not dare to sail from Libau. Those who could not afford passports, those evading military duty, those who knew of irregularities in their passport applications -- all exited from the Empire in stealth across either the German or Austrian borders. There they were joined by their Austro-Hungarian and Roumanian brethren. The ports of Hamburg, Bremen, Rotterdam, Antwerp, and even Liverpool all competed for this traffic. But in the era when German and English liners dominated the waves and steerage business, Jewish passengers congregated on the ships of the giants. The attractions of a departure from German ports -- the comparatively shorter journey across a single foreign nation, coupled with the assistance the German Jews offered and the coercion of all transmigrants at the border control stations to use German ships -- made the ports of Hamburg and Bremen the most popular points of embarkation for the Jewish emigrants-in-transit. Between 1909 and 1913, more than half of all Jewish immigrants to the United States sailed from these seaports.⁷

With Hapag and Lloyd carrying 200,000 East European Jewish emigrants in the years 1909-13, the shipping companies of Libau, Rotterdam, Antwerp, Fiume (in Hungary), and Liverpool had to compete for a share of the remaining traffic of less than 200,000 Jewish emigrants. For those emigrants not embarking from Hamburg or Bremen, other North Sea ports afforded service to America, the Holland America Line steamed straight to New York from Rotterdam, while the Red Star Line carried steerage passengers there from Antwerp. Emigrants could easily reach these seaports by rail, and Jewish committees in both cities offered assistance to the travelers. Yet, while Jewish emigrants-in-transit passed through Rotterdam and Antwerp, as well as Libau, Hamburg, and Bremen, some passengers bound for America from these harbors did not sail directly across the Atlantic. Rather they purchased tickets valid only as far as Britain.⁸

What induced substantial numbers of Jewish emigrants to take a ship to England, land at one port of entry, cross Britain by train to Liverpool, and sail from there overseas? Surely the logistics of the extra stops -- the journey from the continent to England, finding accommodations at the port of landing, getting to the railroad station, and then securing new lodgings at Liverpool, all the while carrying heavy bundles and bags -- made this route exceptionally cumbersome, especially when considering that emigrants could sail directly from the continent to America. What then persuaded East European Jews to trek through England? In a word -- money; it was cheaper to sail to Britain, take a train to Liverpool, and

embark from there for America, than to travel without delay from the continent to the United States. In 1903, the fare from Liverpool to America amounted to five pounds, ten shillings. The price of a steerage passage from Rotterdam, Hamburg, or Bremen to New York required an additional two to three pounds. Yet, a ticket to Britain from the continent cost no more than thirty-six shillings, the steerage fare from Libau to London. The tariff on a steamer trip from Germany to England had only just jumped to twenty-four shillings, and passage from Rotterdam or Antwerp was even cheaper. Since the price of a steamship ticket to America included the cost of accommodations in the various port cities, East European Jewish emigrants could conceivably save a considerable amount of money, if they willingly prolonged their journeys to take the circuitous route through Great Britain.⁹

Not only did emigrants save money on this route, but East European ticket agents encouraged travel by way of England. Many of these agents had established contacts with brokers in Britain. Family relationships bolstered some of these business connections. And with the system of double ticketing that this route required, that is ticketing the emigrant once from the continent to Britain and a second time from England to America, both agents earned commissions. It was even possible for the agent to make a larger profit in booking passengers through to England. An agent could hoodwink an uninformed emigrant by charging the price of a direct trip from Germany to America, send the passenger via England, and pocket the

difference between the two fares for himself.¹⁰

But cheaper fares and the encouragement of some agents were not the only factors enticing East European Jews to transmigrate through England. The assistance rendered by British Jews also played a significant role in drawing the East European Jews to Britain. Numerous philanthropies worked to protect, shelter, and aid both Jewish immigrants and transmigrants as they landed in England. Furthermore, the relatively tolerant stance of the British government on Jewish immigration, especially when compared with the attitude of other European countries, enabled East European Jews to enter the United Kingdom.¹¹

Until 1906, Britain had no legislation restricting immigration. On January 1, 1906, however, the British Aliens' Act became law. The result of several years of study in Parliament including the mammoth Minutes of Evidence taken before the Royal Commission on Alien Immigration, this legislation placed some pecuniary and physical restrictions on the hitherto unlimited immigration of foreigners into the U.K. But the Aliens' Act permitted exceptions to these regulations for the landing of anyone driven from his/her native country by religious or political persecution. Jewish refugees, fleeing the pogroms and disabling legislation of Eastern Europe, apparently continued to settle in Britain, although the numbers of Jewish immigrants did decline. Many of these immigrants desirous of going on to America but without the sufficient means to travel immediately any further, could land in England, work there

until they had saved enough to purchase steamship tickets, and then resume their journeys. Moreover, direct transmigration through England remained unobstructed. The Alients' Act permitted all emigrants-in-transit, possessing an overseas steamship ticket at the time of their landing, to skip the scrutiny of the exclusionary tests required by this new law. So although Jewish emigrants sailed to America from any of the North Sea ports, transmigration through England remained an attractive alternative for the East European Jews.¹²

With these factors enticing Jewish migration via England, why then did not more East European transmigrants take this significantly cheaper, although time consuming, route? The answer lies with the transportation companies. The German steamship lines fiercely competed with the British for these passengers. At times the rivalry was so intense that the shipping companies undercut each other's prices, even though they lost money on the sale of steerage tickets. In 1895, a rate war between Germany and England had reached just such an unremunerative point. To prevent further losses, the English companies agreed to join the North Atlantic Steamship Association, established by the Hamburg-American, North German Lloyd, Belgian Red Star, and Holland America Lines in 1892, to set common prices and divide the steerage traffic.¹³

As members of the association, the English lines consented to fix their trans-Atlantic fares and to accept a limitation on their share of the continental market. Germany abandoned the Scandinavian

route to the British, in return for which the English lines granted the Germans dominance in the East European passenger service. In order to insure that emigrants could not circumvent this understanding by traveling to England to take advantage of the cheaper fares there, the conference imposed upon the British companies the condition that they carry no continental transmigrant who had spent less than six weeks in England. Presumably, this time constraint would deter emigrants to America from traveling through the United Kingdom. The shipping lines also agreed to pay penalties to a common fund, to be divided among the conference members, if they exceeded their proportionate share of the assigned traffic. In 1899, the Beaver Line, which had never signed the original agreement, effectively annulled this pact when it began carrying transmigrants to America regardless of the time of their stay in Britain.¹⁴

Rivalry between the British and continental companies -- price wars, cut-rate fares, the diversion of emigrants from one line to another -- continued. Only the formation of another shipping pool, encompassing eleven out of the twelve major North Atlantic steamship lines, eased the tension. In 1908, the members of the North Atlantic Conference agreed to set prices and allocate passenger traffic to each company, this time solely on a percentage, not a geographic, basis. Satisfactory relations among the members of the conference lasted until 1914.¹⁵

The upshot of the agreement prohibiting continental passengers to reship without delay from Britain was that the majority of

emigrants-in-transit had to conceal their intention to go on to America. East European agents booking passengers via Britain warned their customers, especially those traveling through Germany, to claim that they planned to settle in England. In order to make certain that German officials did not detect the emigrants' true destination, these travelers paid their agents the full fare to America. In this way the transmigrants could not possibly show a curious German shipping agent that they carried enough money to travel any further than England. The East European agents returned to the emigrants tickets valid only for the first stage of their journey. Instead of obtaining receipts for the rest of their trip, the transmigrants noted only the name and address of a contact in England. After landing in Britain, the emigrants would appear at what turned out to be the office of a shipping agent.¹⁶

If all had gone smoothly, the agency had already received notification to forward the emigrant. But if a delay in communication had occurred and the agent had not yet received word on this passenger, he would refuse to provide lodgings, regularly included in the price of a steamship ticket, for the emigrant until confirmation arrived. In a few cases when established business contacts between the agent on the continent and the firm in England broke down, the emigrants found themselves stranded without recourse to the protection of British commercial law.¹⁷

Having reached England, continental transmigrants could evade the required waiting period. Those, unwilling to stick around

England for six weeks, a figure subsequently raised to three months, changed their names. With the new identity conferred by an English name, the emigrants embarked for America. As steamship officials became aware of this scheme, agents tried to shorten the stay of passengers awaiting reshipment, dispatching them as soon as "the green was pretty well worn off."¹⁸

Instructed to conceal their actual destinations from all inquiries, continental emigrants traveling through England continued to deny even to British officials that they were really bound for the United States. This behavior, coupled with the fact that many transmigrants shipped out under new names or listed Britain as their country of last permanent residence on the ship's manifest, makes it impossible to get an accounting of the numbers of East European Jews embarking from British ports. Available statistics do, however, substantiate the impression that England played an important role in sending Jewish emigrants overseas.

Between 1897 and 1902, of the 102,309 aliens landing at the port of London from Hamburg, Bremen, and Rotterdam, 71 percent were classified as Russians -- primarily Poles and Jews -- and as Roumanian and Galician Jews. Of these, nearly 13,000 declared themselves transmigrants through England. At the same time 11,500 passengers arriving at London from Libau also labeled themselves transmigrants. In fact, a number of witnesses before the Royal Commission on Alien Immigration testified that these statistics represented a bare minimum figure, and that many, if not the majority, of passengers landing in England

eventually emigrated overseas. In an effort to secure more accurate records on Jewish emigrants-in-transit through Britain, the leaders of English Jewry used the Russian Hebrew press to encourage their co-religionists to admit to British officials that they were really en route to America. But as long as the shipping associations restricted transmigration from Eastern Europe through England, the emigrants continued to conceal their final destinations. And it proves, therefore, impossible to know just how many East European Jews used this circuitous path, beyond the general impression that the traffic was sizable and of importance.¹⁹

That impression is further bolstered by the variety of organizations established by British Jewry to aid the emigrants-in-transit. Just as German Jewry's benevolence enticed East European Jews to migrate across the Reich, so too the philanthropies of English Jewry must have played a role in drawing transmigrants to this route. Although East European Jews began arriving in England in the wake of the famine in northeastern Russia in 1869, only the pogroms of 1881-82 spurred British Jewry to act on a grand scale. In 1882, British Jews, with the assistance of humanitarian fellow Christians, created the Mansion House Fund to collect monies for those fleeing the pogroms. The Mansion House Committee spent most of its 108,000 pound treasury in diverting these refugees from England to America. Its agents went to Lvov and Brody to organize emigration to the U.S. and Canada. A special branch in Liverpool provided food, shelter, clothing, and medical care for the emigrants sailing from that city.

By the time the Committee suspended operations at the end of 1882, it had helped at least 7,700 Jews to emigrate overseas.²⁰

The Russo-Jewish Committee, the successor to the Mansion House Committee, along with the London and Provincial Jewish Boards of Guardians and other societies continued to safeguard the welfare of Jewish transmigrants and immigrants in England. Because of its location in the important Atlantic seaport, the Board of Guardians for the Relief of Jewish Poor of Liverpool dealt extensively with Jewish transmigrants. In its early years the Board found itself overwhelmed by the problems that arose in handling the large numbers of Jewish emigrants-in-transit. While initially it contributed towards the fares of East European Jews desirous of going on to America, by 1888 it refused to help any but special cases, such as wives separated from their husbands, to travel overseas. The Board had concluded that if it kept subsidizing steamship passages, "poor Jews would be attracted in shoals to Liverpool as a port of embarkation in the hope of being sent on to America." The Liverpool Board of Guardians, however, did spend significant sums in transporting re-migrants; that is, repatriating East European Jews debarking at Liverpool either because American officials had rejected them as unfit for immigration or because they had decided of their own accord to return home. It also maintained a hostel for the temporary shelter of poor Jews waiting at the port.²¹

British Jewry assisted Jewish transmigrants through England, not only at the ports of embarkation, but also at the ports of entry

to the island. In London in 1885, a small group of British Jews established the Poor Jews' Temporary Shelter to protect those landing there. This organization, operating independently of the Board of Guardians, responded to the plight of Jews who found themselves with no place to go and who, therefore, perhaps easily fell prey to "crimps," "sweaters," and white-slave traders upon landing. In order to shield these emigrants, a representative from the Shelter boarded each boat in the London harbor, and making no distinction between Jews and gentiles, marshalled the emigrants together, supervised their docking, and warned them against sharks and swindlers with their schemes for cheap fares to America. Shelter officials would release the approximately five percent of all passengers met at the wharf by relatives, only after ascertaining that such people actually knew one another. Then while unmarried women were escorted to lodgings at the Sarah Pyke Home for the protection of single girls, all others were taken to the Shelter.²²

At the Poor Jews' Temporary Shelter workers registered the emigrants and recorded their destinations. Shelter officials would accompany those with the names of relatives, friends, or agents to contact, some 89 percent of all arrivals, to make certain that the emigrants found the addresses and that they were received as planned by people they knew or by reputable agents. The remaining 6 percent of the emigrants, directed neither to family nor to agents, could stay at the Shelter, which was registered as a common lodging house, for a maximum of two weeks. One official estimated that from 1888

to 1901, 27,241 people had passed through the Poor Jews' Temporary Shelter, 63 percent of whom said that they were transmigrants, a figure that he assumed to be low. In fact, the demands upon the Shelter became so great that in 1904, the president of the Shelter called for the construction of a new building as the old one which housed only men could not accommodate all those requiring temporary lodgings.²³

While these British Jewish philanthropies protected and supported Jewish emigrants-in-transit through England, it must be emphasized that the charitable societies of Great Britain, just as those located elsewhere on the continent and in America,

worked with and assisted only a small part of the movement, the larger Jewish communities in the lands of immigration being established primarily by spontaneous emigration which often took place against the wishes of the Jewish leaders.

That these philanthropies handled only a fraction of all East European Jewish emigrants-in-transit through England reflected not only the foundations' policies on whom to aid and by how much, but also the means and pride of individual transmigrants. Not all Jewish transmigrants required assistance, and many who did exhibited a fierce pride which barred them from accepting charity. Solomon Ornstein recalled that in 1890, he spent part of the Passover holidays in a London lodging house subsisting on matzot and herring so as not to break the Passover dietary laws. Although told that he could get a warm, kosher meal for free at a nearby Jewish welfare institution, Ornstein refused to humble himself and go there.²⁴

Most Jewish transmigrants holding paid-up tickets to points overseas had no need to turn to the Jewish charities since their passages included all arrangements for their stay in Great Britain. The quality of these accommodations, however, varied. While the government did register and supervise common lodging houses, all transmigrant accommodations did not fall within this category. Emigrants-in-transit stopping in London to pick up the overseas portion of their tickets discovered a range of accommodations. Those expecting their London agents to shelter them in accordance with the terms of their ship's contracts were likely to find that their agents dumped them, not in common lodging houses, but in tenements or even donkey sheds where they waited before traveling on to Liverpool.²⁵

In Liverpool, however, the British shipping lines maintained lodging houses, duly licensed by the government, for their passengers. Steamship company representatives would meet transmigrants at the railroad depot and guide them to these boarding houses. The Liverpool sanitary police inspected these hotels, checking to see that their proprietors kept them clean, that they served adequate food, and that they sent all those who fell ill to the city hospitals. Jewish emigrants-in-transit had separate hotels equipped with kosher kitchens.²⁶

This system of sheltering emigrants in boarding houses scattered throughout the city had a number of drawbacks. The lodging houses were for the most part located some distance from the piers, making it burdensome for the steamship companies to transport the emigrants to the docks. The quality of the accommodations varied, depending

upon a given hotel's age, size, and even the habits of the emigrants there. And with so many boarding houses careful supervision of the transmigrants during their stay in Liverpool proved difficult. Between the summer of 1906 and that of 1907, the Cunard Steamship Company remedied these problems by adopting a scheme, first pioneered by the German Hamburg-American Line, of housing all emigrants-in-transit in one facility.²⁷

In Liverpool, Cunard built a small village designed to accommodate up to 2,000 steerage passengers. Here the emigrants slept in dormitories of ten to fifteen beds. Two dining rooms, seating 700 people, served wholesome food. Jewish travelers had a separate residence complete with a kosher kitchen. A staff of British immigrants, speaking the languages of the transmigrants, assisted the hotel keeper and matron who managed the village. As in all Liverpool boarding houses, physicians of the Board of Trade examined the steerage passengers to make certain that they could withstand the rigors of the voyage and that they passed the tests of foreign immigration laws. If they were not seriously ill, Jewish transmigrants detained by these physicians could stay at the expense of the steamship company or of the Jewish Board of Guardians until well enough to continue their voyages.²⁸

While waiting in Liverpool for the departure of their ships, the Jewish emigrants-in-transit behaved just like travelers of any era -- they wandered about the city. Department stores, factories, tanneries, and the bustling harbor intrigued them. Some passed their time picking up useful English phrases. Industrious transmigrants even tried to

learn a "trade" useful for an English-speaking land; one emigrant felt "immeasurably safer" after a Yiddish-speaking boy taught him the art of hawking newspapers with English titles. Yet, with no money for carfare or a midday meal outside the lodging house, many transmigrants found the city itself "hard, cold, and gloomy;" their emigration quarters, overcrowded and depressing. Such unpleasant impressions are not surprising. For by the time the Jewish emigrants had reached Liverpool, they had traveled a long way for many days, if not weeks. They had spent a great deal of time in transit and still had not embarked on the greatest part of their voyage, the journey overseas. Already many of them were homesick for a Russia that now took on an imaginary rosy glow. For Harry Burroughs, England held:

The same grim faces, the same nasal monotones, smoke and dirt on the roofs and buildings, no songs nor flags nor resplendent domes. No broad avenues with bridle paths on which military officers and high-bred ladies cantered. I preferred Odessa or Sebastopol, infinitely, and wished heartily that I were back on the coast of the Black Sea.²⁹

Jewish transmigrants in England were not the only ones to feel the pangs of homesickness. But at least the excitement of seeing Liverpool helped some to pass the time and to forget their sadness briefly. However, the East European Jews traveling through Hamburg were denied even this diversion, since they spent their days in that thriving German seaport incarcerated behind the walls of the Auswandererhallen.

The Auswandererhallen or "Emigrant Hostels," built by the Hamburg-American Line on the outskirts of Hamburg, served as the final link in the chain of controls that the German authorities had devised to regulate the passage of transmigrants through the Reich. At the border control stations and at the interior checkpoint at Ruhleben, the emigrants had already been screened as to their suitability for transmigration through Germany and immigration overseas. These stations had also sheltered the emigrants-in-transit and had isolated them from the German populace. The Hamburg Auswandererhallen was in a sense the last control station. It provided lodgings for the emigrants-in-transit; it gave the steamship company officials one more opportunity to weed out those who did not meet the criteria of U.S. immigration legislation; and it kept the emigrants off the streets of Hamburg.³⁰

Hapag had built the Auswandererhallen at the instigation of the Hamburg municipal government. Since its founding in 1847, the Hamburg-Americanische Packetfahrt Actiengesellschaft, as the Hamburg-American Line was originally called, had seen a fairly steady growth in the numbers of emigrant passengers it carried. But between 1890 and 1891, the number of emigrants on board Hapag ships suddenly jumped from 99,350 to 144,382. The single most important factor accounting for this increase was the influx of Russian Jews emigrating after the expulsion of the Jews from Moscow.³¹

This sudden rise in the numbers of foreign transmigrants in Hamburg worried the authorities. The city did not have enough emigrant

inns to accommodate all these travelers. Furthermore, many of these transmigrants came from areas in Russia and Austria-Hungary rife with cholera. Hamburg officials feared the consequences of lodging emigrants from infested regions at inns located in the most crowded parts of the city. The solution lay in removing the emigrants-in-transit, or as many of them as possible, from Hamburg proper. In 1891, Hapag, therefore, built the Auswandererhallen, a cluster of emigrant hostels equipped with bathing and disinfection apparatus located outside the city near the harbor. The transmigrants could enter the station and leave it to board their ships without ever passing through the heart of Hamburg.³²

In 1892, an outbreak of cholera compelled the Hamburg authorities to bar for a time all Russian and Austro-Hungarian transmigrants from the city. Afterwards, with the reduction in the number of transmigrants that resulted from the new German restrictions on the emigrants-in-transit, Hamburg's emigrant inns and the new Auswandererhallen could easily have accommodated all those sailing from the port. But the cholera epidemic had already confirmed the worst fears of the city officials. Convinced that the emigrants-in-transit through Hamburg endangered the health of their citizenry, the municipal authorities determined to segregate the transmigrants from the local populace. They persuaded Hapag that such a separation of its steerage passengers was no longer merely desirable; it had become essential. Hapag, therefore, expanded the Auswandererhallen to house more travelers. Knowing that the emigrants would be

confined to the station for several days or a week or more, the company tried to accommodate the travelers by building a church and a synagogue and opening a small shop selling travel items.³³

The original Auswandererhallen seems to have been typical of Hamburg emigrant hostels of the 1880's and 1890's, in that it furnished poor accommodations and inadequate food. In 1891, twelve-year old Rose Cohen traveled with her Aunt Masha to America. In Hamburg, they stayed either at the Auswandererhallen or at another emigrant inn run by Hapag. For a week Rose and her aunt slept in a dirty room on bug-infested mattresses. Although the food served at their first breakfast appeared edible, neither Rose nor Masha grabbed at it fast enough to get anything to eat. They spent their days waiting in a large hall for the agent to call them to their ships. And Rose stayed awake at night guarding her aunt from the bold advances of men -- both officials and fellow passengers -- who threatened to molest her.³⁴

Mary Antin has also left behind her impressions of this Auswandererhallen. While her description of the accommodations reflects her imaginative and vivid literary style, her account closely parallels that recorded by Rose Cohen. During the ride from the railroad depot to the emigrant station, Mary was reminded of the way criminals were taken off to prison. After she got her first glimpse of the emigrant station, she understood why: "The fences -- they really were solid walls -- had wires and nails on top, so that one couldn't even climb to get a look at the sea." When Mary's mother

protested that she did not have the fifteen marks required for her family's board, the agent ordered a matron to search all the Antins to see if she could turn up the money. Their quarters resembled a soldiers' barracks -- large rooms with rows of beds and scanty bedding. The Antins spent eight days in the Auswandererhallen waiting for their ship, hungry from the poverty of the food, and frustrated by their confinement which permitted them only to walk in the yard or sit on their cots.³⁵

In 1901, when the site of the original Auswandererhallen was required for other purposes, Hapag built a new station on the Veddel outside Hamburg. This location had a number of advantages. Its rail connections permitted a separate emigrant depot; it was close to the quays; and the state had even donated some of the land. The new facility, built at a cost of one million marks, originally encompassed twenty-five square kilometers and was designed to accommodate 1,000 emigrants. In 1906, Hapag improved upon this second Auswandererhallen by enlarging it and constructing a number of new buildings. Ultimately, the Hamburg-American Line spent three million marks on an emigrant facility that covered 60,000 square kilometers, accommodated 4,000 travelers, and encompassed more than forty buildings.³⁶

The accommodations afforded by the second Auswandererhallen seem to have significantly improved over those of the first. Although one observer admitted that he noticed discrepancies between his experiences in the Auswandererhallen as a steerage passenger

and his impressions of the station as an immigration investigator, experts in immigration affairs praised the Auswandererhallen, deeming it "in every respect a model institution" . . . "regarded as the most complete emigrant station in Europe."³⁷

This time Hapag did away with the barracks, which both Mary Antin and Rose Cohen had found so obnoxious, in favor of a system of pavillions. Each pavillion included a number of dormitories furnished with twenty to forty beds; a comfortable sitting room equipped with tables, chairs, and desks; and the necessary wash-rooms and lavatories. In addition to these lodgings, the second Auswandererhallen offered a dining hall which reportedly served wholesome and abundant food; two churches, one Catholic and one Protestant, encircled by gardens and walkways; a synagogue, located in less pleasant surroundings next to the coach-house and stables; a canteen; a music pavillion where an orchestra played; a hospital; a warehouse; an administration building; and a Hapag ticket bureau. Emigrants with some means could stay in the more gracious facilities of the Hotel Nord or Hotel Sud which provided small rooms for families. All buildings were equipped with heat and electric lights, and a paling surrounded the entire complex to prevent anyone from leaving by any means other than through the designated gates.

Hamburg police and medical officers supervised the Auswandererhallen. The emigrants generally spent three to four days there waiting to board ship. During that time all emigrants, except Russians and Jews, were permitted to leave the grounds to visit

Hamburg or to stay at hotels there, if they wished. But accommodations at the Auswandererhallen cost so little -- one to two marks per day for those who could pay -- that most emigrants preferred to board there.³⁸

The Auswandererhallen was divided into two separate areas, the "unclean side" and the "clean side." All emigrants entered on the "unclean side" where Hapag physicians checked to see that they were fit to pass over to the residence section of the station, the "clean side," described above. These physicians included a doctor trained at Ellis Island to detect those diseases for which U.S. officers excluded alien immigrants. Those who passed this inspection then proceeded to the baths to shower while their clothes were disinfected. After the examination and bath the emigrants received a card, numbered to sixteen, that was punched daily at the inspections of the emigrants repeated on the "clean side" of the Auswandererhallen.³⁹

The Auswandererhallen offered some special accommodations for its Jewish guests. Hapag policy promoted grouping nationalities together whenever possible. For the Jewish emigrants-in-transit the Auswandererhallen provided a separate dormitory, which facilitated the observance of the Jewish Sabbath and holidays, and a kosher kitchen supervised by a rabbi and a mashgiach, an authority on the ritual dietary laws. Hapag officials also cooperated with Hamburg Jewish charities in the matter of the transmigrants. The Auswandererhallen stored clothes collected by the Jewish

philanthropies in its warehouse, and Hapag agents turned Jewish travelers, barred from immigrating to America, over to the Jewish committee that cared for those rejected.⁴⁰

The Auswandererhallen not only sheltered the emigrants-in-transit, it also protected them from the kinds of abuses commonly perpetrated upon uninformed travelers biding their time in strange cities. While some transmigrants resented their confinement to the station, Hapag championed the restrictions on the emigrants' freedom of movement. The company boasted that in isolating the transmigrants, it shielded them from confidence tricksters, unscrupulous agents, and white slavers. Presumably, these protectionist measures severely reduced incidences of fraud, common in Hamburg before the construction of the Auswandererhallen. It is not surprising then that the Auswandererhallen became the model for emigrant stations subsequently built in other port cities.⁴¹

What is surprising, however, is that the North German Lloyd of Bremen did not begin building a similar emigrant station until 1906. The 1892 cholera epidemic that panicked Hamburg officials did not have a similar impact on Bremen. Whereas in Hamburg the government had demanded the isolation of the transmigrants, in Bremen the authorities took no such steps. Moreover, in the 1880's the lodging of emigrants had become a thriving business in Bremen. In 1880, the city had eighteen emigrant boarding houses; but by 1893, it supported seventy such inns. The landlords of these hostels worked together to resist efforts by either the Lloyd or

its agent F. Missler to establish their own facilities for the shelter of the emigrants-in-transit. When in 1906, Lloyd and Missler jointly built the Bremen Auswandererhallen to accommodate the ever increasing numbers of emigrants-in-transit through the city, they did so over the objections of these inn-keepers. When it was completed, the Bremen Auswandererhallen handled less than half of the Lloyd's emigrant passengers. The majority of the transmigrants passing through Bremen still stayed at private boarding houses.⁴²

In 1891, U.S. immigration commissioners had ranked the Bremen lodging houses superior to those that they had seen elsewhere. In 1906, however, when other U.S. investigators visited Bremen after having seen the Hamburg Auswandererhallen, they took a more critical view of the emigrant accommodations in that city. They found these lodgings overpriced and overcrowded. In the busy season several people often shared a single bed. Without a central reception station, those waiting to board the train for the port of Bremerhaven sat on curbs or congregated at Missler's offices or at the warehouse where the Lloyd physicians had conducted their examinations. While emigrants-in-transit through Bremen could move freely about the city, they found that the Bremen police paid little attention to their lodging houses, where the motto, "to give as little as possible and get as much as they could," apparently reigned.⁴³

In 1906, North German Lloyd and Missler finally built an Auswandererhallen in Bremen, partly as a way of alleviating the

overcrowding in the emigrant inns that the U.S. immigration investigators had criticized. Jewish emigrants-in-transit through Bremen, however, did not benefit from the new facility, for the Auswandererhallen did not at first offer separate Jewish accommodations.

Rather Jewish emigrants in Bremen continued to find lodgings in any number of other places -- private boarding houses or those maintained by the Bremen Committee for Israelite Emigrants or the Stadt Warschau, a hostel run by Missler which provided kosher food. By 1914, the Bremen Auswandererhallen apparently did shelter Jews, for one memoirist recalled staying in Bremen in barracks surrounded by barbed wire -- a description that sounds much like the Auswandererhallen.⁴⁴

The East European Jews were a part of the thousands of emigrants streaming to America who converged upon these seaports. Lacking the passport required to travel via Libau, most East European Jews embarked from more distant harbors for America. Of these, Liverpool was the furthest away. But the financial savings that this route offered, plus the promise of assistance from British Jewry, enticed significant numbers of East European Jews to stop in Great Britain on their way to America. Still, ships sailing from Hamburg and Bremen carried more than half of all Jewish immigrants to America. In these seaports not only did the protectionist arrangements created by the German government and steamship companies for the emigrants-in-transit continue, but German Jewry also continued its assistance and insurance of care for the special ritual

needs of the travelers.

No matter which port the Jewish emigrants sailed from -- Libau or Liverpool, Hamburg or Bremen -- and no matter what happened to them there -- whether they slept on bug-infested mattresses in dirty lodgings and were "taken in" by agents and confidence tricksters, or whether they found gracious accommodations and generosity from local Jews -- the emigrants still faced the final stage of their voyage, the journey to America by steam, the crossing of the Atlantic in steamship steerage.

Notes

1

On the inconsistencies in Russian policy on Jewish emigration, see Hans Rogger, "Tsarist Policy on Jewish Emigration," Soviet Jewish Affairs, 3:1 (1973), pp. 28-36. On the complexities of obtaining a Russian passport, see *supra.*, pp. 58-61. On the port of Libau, see National Archives Record Group 85, 51411/56, Report of Philip Cowen, 31 January 1907, pp. 30-35; Great Britain, Royal Commission on Alien Immigration, Report of the Royal Commission on Alien Immigration (London, 1903), Evidence 13349.

Libau was located in the Province of Courland. Although not technically a part of the Pale of Settlement, Jews registered there since 1835 retained the right of residence. Jewish Encyclopedia, Volume 9, (New York, 1905), pp. 468-70.

2

On the proposals for a new law governing Russian emigration, see NA, RG 85, 51411/1, Digest of Reports of the Immigration Commission on Conditions Affecting Emigration, 1907, p. 49; Rogger, p. 31; Zosa Szajkowski, "Sufferings of Jewish Emigrants to America in Transit Through Germany," Jewish Social Studies, 39 (1977), p. 110.

3

NA, RG 85, 51411/1, p. 49; NA, RG 85, 51411/56, pp. 30-35.

4

NA, RG 59, 3815/1-3, Memo of William P. Dillingham, 11 July 1907; NA, RG 59, 861.56, Letter from S.C. Neale, Counsel for American Line, to P.C. Knox, Secretary of State, 16 March 1910. One can guess that the unspecified "equivalent in exchange" might have included changes in the Russian policies of refusing to visa the passports of American Jews and of imprisoning naturalized American citizens who returned to their native land for a visit. On the American reaction to this treatment of its citizens, see Ann E. Healy, "Post-1881 Anti-Semitism and U.S.-Russian Relations." Unpublished Paper, University of Wisconsin - Milwaukee, (Private Files, Michael Curran, Ohio State University).

5 The number of aliens landing at the Port of London from Libau jumped from 1,850 in 1899 to 7,020 in 1903. (Royal Commission, Tables LXIII and LXIII (a), pp. 77-78.) While figures for subsequent years for emigrants embarking at Libau are unavailable, it is presumed that this trend continued, spurred on by the inducements the Russian government offered to passengers taking this route.

Royal Commission, 6174, 22541, 16362; American Jewish Archives, Box No. 732, Charles Losk Journal, 1905-47; NA, RG 85, 51411/56, pp. 30-35; NA RG 59, 8143/3, Letter from Consul William Thompson Fee, 13 September 1907; NA, RG 51411/1, p. 72; United States, Department of Labor, Bureau of Immigration, Annual Report of the Commissioner General of Immigration for Fiscal 1913-14 (Washington, D.C., 1915), p. 398.

6 On the wretched state of the steerages on Libau ships, see Royal Commission, 6160-6971; Major W. Evans-Gordon, The Alien Immigrant (London, 1903), pp. 98-103. The memoirs of the following Jewish emigrants describe their departures from Libau: Elizabeth Hasanovitz, One of Them: Chapters from a Passionate Autobiography (New York, 1918), pp. 12-15; Melech Epstein, Pages from a Colorful Life (Detroit, 1971), pp. 48-49; AJA Box No. 732, Charles Losk Journal, 1905-47.

7 Supra., pp. 88-90, 106-10.

8 On emigrant accommodations maintained by the Holland America Line at Rotterdam, see NA, RG 85, 51411/1, p. 103; Royal Commission, 21713; ARCGI for Fiscal 1913-14, p. 376. Jews passing through Rotterdam received assistance from the Montefiore Society. American Jewish Historical Society, Waltham, Massachusetts. Alexander Harkavy Papers, Diary of a Visit to Europe in the interests of Jewish Emigration, 1906, transcribed by Marc Lee Raphael.

On the transmigrant boarding houses in Antwerp, see U.S., 52nd Congress, 1st session, 1892. House Executive Document 235 (Congressional Serial Set Volume 2957): Enforcement of Alien Contract Labor Laws, pp. 19-20; NA, RG 85, 51411/1, p. 101. In Antwerp, the Committee Ezra sheltered Jewish transmigrants. It also fought unsuccessfully to persuade the Red Star Line to carry kosher provisions on board. AJHS, Harkavy Diary.

- 9 Philip Taylor also suggests that substantial numbers of East European Jews transmigrated through Britain; The Distant Magnet: European Emigration to U.S.A. (New York, 1971), p. 147. On the cost of transportation to America, see Royal Commission, 1430-36, 1456, 1535, 16286, 21713. When Solomon Ornstein reached Hamburg in 1890, he was one mark short of the fare to America. "People" advised him to travel via England as it was cheaper; My Sixty Years in America (New York, 1952), p. 62.
- 10 Royal Commission, 1420-25, 1437-58; Evans-Gordon, pp. 98-99.
- 11 Lloyd P. Gartner, The Jewish Immigrant in England, 1870-1914 (Detroit, 1960), pp. 43-48; Compare German policy on Jewish immigration, Jack L. Wertheimer, "German Policy and Jewish Policies: The Absorption of East European Jews in Germany, 1868-1914," Diss. Columbia University (1978); pp. 534-40 summarize his findings.
- 12 On the decline in Jewish immigration to England as a result of the Aliens' Act, see Mark Wischnitzer, To Dwell in Safety (Philadelphia, 1948), p. 120. V.D. Lipman in his article on England in the Encyclopedia Judaica (Volume 6, column 759, 1972) contradicted Wischnitzer, claiming that the numbers of Jewish immigrants to England declined initially as a result of the Aliens' Act, but that Jewish immigration soon rose again. On the implications of the Aliens' Act for American immigration, see NA, RG 85, 51411/1, pp. 49-53. On stopping in England just long enough to earn passage to America, see Samuel Chotzinoff, A Lost Paradise (New York, 1955), pp. 44-56; Matthew Josephson, Sidney Hillman: Statesman of American Labor (Garden City, 1952), pp. 35-36.
- 13 Lamar Cecil, Albert Ballin: Business and Politics in Imperial Germany, 1888-1918 (Princeton, 1967), p. 46; Szajkowski, "Sufferings . . .," p. 104.
- 14 Royal Commission, 1430-37; 1502-04; 21713.
- 15 The standard work on the Atlantic shipping pools is Erich Murken, Die grossen transatlantischen Linienreederei-Verbande, Pools und Interessen Gemeinschaften (Jena, 1922). Murken provides detailed information on price fluctuations as a result of the on-going rivalry, cf. pp. 35 and 76. On the 1904 tariff war, see pp. 267-68. Cecil summarizes Murken's findings, pp. 45-62. For the impact of this rivalry on East European

- Jewish emigrant traffic, see Gartner, p. 36; Jewish Chronicle, 27 May 1904.
- 16 In London four Jewish firms handled this traffic; Royal Commission, 1333-40, 1420-30.
- 17 Royal Commission, 1430-55, 16502.
- 18 Royal Commission, 1525-26, 1547, 16286; NA, RG 85, 51411/1, p. 21.
- 19 Wischnitzer supplies a number of contradictory figures on Jewish immigration to and transmigration through England, pp. 118-19. He suggests that only a third of the 300,000 Eastern Jewish newcomers to Britain between 1891 and 1905 settled there permanently. Gartner estimated that 120,000 Eastern Jews established residence in England, p. 30; Royal Commission, Tables LXII, LXIII, pp. 76-77; evidence 23-40, 1364, 22331.
- 20 Hermann Landau, president of the Poor Jews' Temporary Shelter, testified before the Royal Commission on Alien Immigration that the Shelter did not lure Eastern Jews to England, because it provided only temporary assistance. (16280) His statement sounds somewhat defensive, especially when considering that East European agents deliberately sent Jewish emigrants, too diseased or impoverished to pass the scrutiny of U.S. immigration law, directly to England, knowing that the Shelter would aid them until they could travel further. Broughton Brandenburg, Imported Americans (New York, 1904), p. 40. Gartner, pp. 41-44; Wischnitzer, pp. 40, 45-46; Royal Commission, 16269; Jewish Encyclopedia, vol. 8, pp. 269-97.
- 21 Gartner, pp. 44-45; AJA, Miscellaneous File, Immigrants and Immigration I and II, Notes Taken from Immigration Documents in Liverpool, England by Sefton D. Temkin; For a revision of the traditional view that very few East European Jews re-migrated, see Jonathon D. Sarna, "The Myth of No Return: Jewish Remigration to Eastern Europe, 1881-1914," American Jewish History 71 (1981), pp. 256-68.
- 22 Royal Commission, 4899-901, 15456, 16271-73; Jewish Chronicle 8 Jan. 1904, p. 22; 12 Feb. 1904, pp. 22-23; Gartner, pp. 37, 52-54.

- 23 Royal Commission, 16274-86, 16505-07; Jewish Chronicle, 29 April 1904, p. 15.
- 24 Archives Leo Baeck Institute. Zosa Szajkowski, "Diplomatic Activities of German Jews; Book One: From 1860 to World War I," manuscript, p. 433. Cf. the role of German Jewish philanthropy, *supra.*, pp. 120-32. Boris Bogen recalled his anger when charity he did not require was forced upon him; Born a Jew (New York, 1930), p. 32; Ornstein, pp. 61-63.
- 25 Royal Commission, 4108, 4898-901.
- 26 Royal Commission, 21444-47, 21469-75; U.S., 43rd Congress, 1st session, 1874. Senate Executive Document 23 (Congressional serial set 1580): Steerage Passengers on Emigrant Vessels, pp. 110-11; U.S. 52nd Congress, 1st session, 1892. House Executive Document 235, Part I (serial 2957): Enforcement of Alien Contract Labor Laws. p. 9; ARCGI for Fiscal 1904-05, pp. 50-51.
- 27 NA, RG 85, 51411/1, pp. 85-86; U.S., 61st Cong., 3rd sess. 1910-11. Sen. Doc. 748 (serial 5870): Reports of the Immigration Commission on Emigration Conditions in Europe, pp. 3-4, 86-88.
- 28 Sen. Doc. 748 (serial 5870): pp. 86-88
- 29 Bernard Horwich, My First Eighty Years (Chicago, 1939), p. 109; AJA, Box No. 732, Charles Losk Journal, 1905-47; AJA, Biographies File, Jacob I. Marks, Reminiscences, p. 99; Harry E. Burroughs, Tale of a Vanished Land: Memories of a Childhood in Russia (Boston, 1930), pp. 321-22.
- 30 Die Auswanderer-Hallen der Hamburg-Amerika Linie in Hamburg (Hamburg, n.d.), courtesy of the Hapag-Lloyd Archives, pp. 11-12.
- 31 Auswanderer-Hallen, pp. 3-5; On the expulsion of the Jews from Moscow, see H. Exec. Doc. 235 (serial 2957): pp. 39-66; Bogen pp. 22-27.
- 32 Auswanderer-Hallen, pp. 12-13; Jewish Chronicle, 25 July 1902, p. 19.

- 33 Supra., pp. 97-102; Auswanderer-Hallen, pp. 13-14.
- 34 Cf. the accommodations of the emigrant hotels in Hamburg proper, H. Exec Doc. 235 (serial 2957): pp. 110-14, and Rose Cohen, Out of the Shadow (New York, 1918), pp. 57-62.
- 35 Mary Antin, From Plotzk to Boston (1899; rpt. Upper Saddle River, New Jersey, 1970), pp. 46-58.
- 36 The following description of the second Auswandererhallen has been drawn from Edward Steiner, On the Trail of the Immigrant (New York, 1906), pp. 14, 34; Cecil, pp. 40-43; NA, RG 85, 51411/51, Report of T. V. Powderly, 9 Jan. 1907; NA, RG 85, 51411/1, pp. 93-96; NA, RG 85, 51411/56, p. 17; AJHS, Harkavy Diary; Sen. Doc. 748 (serial 5870): pp. 99-102; Bernhard Kahn, "Die Judische Auswanderung," Ost und West (July-Aug., 1905), p. 480; ALBI, Emigration Collection, 1881-1914, no. 45, Letter from F. Sherwood to Mr. Behar, 15 Aug. 1907; Royal Commission, 13349, 15909, 19257; Auswanderer-Hallen, pp. 14-26; Jewish Chronicle, 27 July 1902, p. 19.
- A drawing and plans of the Auswandererhallen have been preserved in the National Archives, RG 85, 51411/1. A number of the sources mentioned include photographs of the station. See especially Kahn's article, pp. 462-76, 480. In The Alien Immigrant, Major W. Evans-Gordon recorded his impressions of the Auswandererhallen, evidence that also appears as part of the Report of the Royal Commission on Alien Immigration. In the book, however, Evans-Gordon included photographs of the installation.
- 37 Edward Steiner, From Alien to Citizen (New York, 1914), pp. 32-33; NA, RG 85, 51411/1, p. 93; Sen. Doc. 748 (serial 5870): p. 100.
- 38 The prohibition on Russian and Jewish emigrant traffic in Hamburg was a regulation of the Hamburg government, not Hapag officials; Sen. Doc. 748 (serial 5870): p. 101.
- 39 On 15 May 1907, the Hamburg government modified its regulation of 1892 demanding compulsory bathing of all emigrants and permitted the Hapag physicians to exercise their discretion in this matter; Sen. Doc. 748 (serial 5870): p. 100.

- 40 For a description of a Passover Seder celebrated in the Auswandererhallen, see Antin, pp. 57-59.
- 41 Auswander-Hallen, pp. 15-16; NA, RG 85, 51411/51, p. 26; The memoirs of Jews who passed through Hamburg before 1891 list several ways in which the emigrants were exploited; see Horwich, p. 107; Benjamin L. Gordon, Between Two Worlds: The Memoirs of a Physician (New York, 1952), pp. 133-34; C. Davidson, Out of Endless Yearnings: A Memoir of Israel Davidson (New York, 1946), pp. 14-15; Cunard modeled its stations at Liverpool and Fiume on the Auswandererhallen, supra, p. 20; Sen. Doc. 748 (serial 5870): pp. 92-93.
- 42 Arnold Petzet. Heinrich Wiegand: ein Lebensbild (Bremen, 1932), p. 37; Ludwig Beutin, Bremen und Amerika (Bremen, 1953), pp. 162, 315; NA, RG 85, 51411/51, p. 30.
- 43 NA, RG 85, 51411/1, p. 91; NA, RG 85, 51411/51, pp. 29-30; Steiner, From Alien, pp. 30-31.
- 44 Sen. Doc. 748 (serial 5870): p. 98; AJHS, Harkavy Diary; Kahn, p. 476; Benjamin M. Laikin, Memoirs of a Practical Dreamer: From a Russian Shtetl to an American Suburb (New York, 1971), p. 88.

Chapter V

The Journey to America by Steam: Steerage

As the saltwater sprayed their faces and the tugboats whistled in the harbor, the Jews of Eastern Europe standing on the quays prepared to embark on the final stage of their journey to America -- the crossing in steamship steerage. But before they could board ship, where hundreds of emigrants would jam together in the stifling steerage for a week or more, the transmigrants faced yet another test to determine their eligibility to become American immigrants.

By the time the East European Jews stood at the foot of the gangplank ready to board the steamship for the final stage of their journey, they had already passed a number of tests designed to weed out those not fit to immigrate to America. Physicians at the border control stations had already examined all Jews who had legally entered Germany. But those, who had managed to avoid these stations as well as those in transit through other countries, did not undergo health inspections until they actually reached their ports of embarkation. In these seaports physicians, employed by the various steamship companies, checked all steerage passengers -- even those who had already been examined -- once again.

The idea of a medical inspection of all steerage passengers originated, not in America, but in Europe. In an effort to prevent the outbreak of contagious disease in the overcrowded steerages common to the sailing vessels, and in the hopes of excluding those

not strong enough to stand the lengthy and difficult voyage, the Belgian government began requiring medical examinations of all steerage passengers in 1843. Great Britain followed suit in 1848, after epidemics of ship-fever had killed thousands of Irish passengers a year earlier.¹

Only much later did American officials demand that all emigrants bound for the United States undergo a medical examination before leaving Europe. In 1882, the U.S. government began restricting the classes of aliens it permitted to immigrate. In 1891, a new act extended the list of undesirable immigrants to include "persons suffering from a loathsome or dangerous contagious disease." Taking the position that economic incentives would stop the steamship lines from carrying prohibited immigrants, this law forced these companies to absorb the costs of returning those deported. This penalty prompted a number of the lines to institute inspections of their steerage passengers in accordance with American immigration laws.²

But, as U.S. immigration commissioner H.J. Schulteis reported from Europe in 1892, these examinations were incredibly lax. As long as he remained incognito, Schulteis saw no medical inspections whatsoever in the ports of Bremen, Hamburg, Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Antwerp, and Liverpool. "There may have been physicians around, but the only inspection had, when the emigrants embarked, was that of their passage tickets." However, when Schulteis presented his credentials as an envoy of the U.S. government, he suddenly found that all embarking emigrants underwent thorough examinations.

Schulzeis' report made an impression upon Congress, for when it drafted a new Immigration Act in 1893, it ordered all steamship lines to make a stringent examination of their steerage passengers to see that they met the criteria set by U.S. immigration law. A new quarantine law in the same year authorized U.S. consuls abroad to participate in these inspections to insure their strictness.³

Whether or not European medical officers conducted these exams in the presence of U.S. consular officials depended upon a given nation's policy. But even if the U.S. consuls were not present at the health inspection, these screenings were designed to detect those classes of persons excluded from immigrating under U.S. law and to prevent their embarkation from Europe. In theory the medical examinations were to weed out

all idiots, insane persons, paupers, or persons likely to become a public charge, persons suffering from a loathsome or dangerous contagious disease, persons who have been convicted of a felony or other infamous crime or misdemeanor involving moral turpitude (and) polygamist.⁴

The U.S. Public Health and Marine Service bore the responsibility for determining just what were these "loathsome or dangerous contagious diseases." In 1897, the Service added trachoma, a chronic, highly contagious eye disease, to its list of such illnesses. From that year forward all emigrants-in-transit dreaded the possibility that they or someone in their family had "trachomas on the eyes." The renowned Yiddish humorist Sholem Aleichem comically portrayed the fear that this test for trachoma instilled in one

emigrating family. In The Adventures of Mottel, the Cantor's Son, Mottel's mother was always crying over the difficulties in her life. Her floods of tears had left her eyes perpetually reddened. While this cantor's widow did succeed in passing the dreaded exam for trachoma, many other emigrants were not as fortunate.⁵

Physicians, employed by the steamship companies in the seaports, generally examined the emigrants at least twice for trachoma and other diseases. The first inspection took place shortly after the emigrants' arrival, most likely in the boarding houses, and the second occurred on the day of their departure. This final examination was held either at a special facility maintained by the shipping lines for this purpose or on the gangplank as the emigrants actually boarded the ship. Neither location could be considered especially suited for a proper inspection. In Bremen, the North German Lloyd had at first used a warehouse basement for the final check of its emigrants. Later the Lloyd conducted these inspections in a building adjoining the railroad station amidst the noise of trains leaving for Bremerhaven. In both Hamburg and Liverpool, the steamship company doctors could actually turn back emigrants as they climbed aboard their ships.⁶

These physicians had detailed instructions to prohibit the following from emigrating: loathsome incurables, cripples, idiots, the infirm, single pregnant women, and those with diseases of the eyes, fevers, itches, skin eruptions, chicken pox, measles, scarlet fever, whooping cough, lupus, inflammation of the lungs, tuberculosis,

favus, fresh wounds, deafness, dumbness, and heart disease. But with the doctors examining hundreds, if not thousands, of such emigrants in a single day, they merely tried to weed out the most obviously diseased or clearly feeble travelers. The three doctors, the usual number present at any examination, generally looked for a healthy appearance and only specifically inspected the emigrants for favus, "a dangerous contagious" scalp disorder, and of course for trachoma.⁷

Either at the final examination or else out at sea, the medical officers also vaccinated the emigrants against smallpox. It was virtually impossible to escape this procedure which terrified the transmigrants. Presumably many Jewish emigrants, when they saw the doctor armed with brush, acid, lymph, and lancet, reacted just the way the Italians, observed by the New York investigative journalist Broughton Brandenburg, did.

At the sight of the fierce-looking old man putting down the bared point of steel on my wife's bare arm, the women shrieked and the children began to cry. Little Anastasia made a break for the door, but a guard blocked his exit. Others fought to get out. The other doctors reassured them; and after much difficulty, all in the room were vaccinated . . .

The emigrants tried to render their vaccinations ineffective by wiping off or sucking out the serum. Yet, surely more than one emigrant shared the plight of a swollen, throbbing arm that made an already uncomfortable sea voyage even more disagreeable.⁸

The level of stringency in these examinations seems to have varied greatly. Journalists and immigration investigators who

traveled incognito among the emigrants often reported cursory physicals, in which overworked doctors rushed through several hundred emigrants, sometimes even failing to perform the vaccination properly. Other observers of the immigrant exams, including American consuls stationed in the seaports, disagreed. They found that at least by the twentieth century, especially in Hamburg and Bremen, the steamship company physicians were scrupulous in their screening of the emigrants.⁹

American immigration legislation largely prompted whatever greater care was exercised in these examinations after the turn of the century. In 1899, the U.S. Commissioner General of Immigration reported a marked increase in the numbers of diseased passengers landing at U.S. ports. He claimed that these unhealthy emigrants should never have been allowed to leave Europe in the first place, since their immigration was prohibited under the act of 1891. A study by U.S. Marine Hospital surgeons determined that had the examining European physicians exercised reasonable care, they would have prevented these emigrants from embarking. On the basis of this study the Commissioner General informed the steamship lines that in the future he would institute legal actions each time they tried to land a diseased alien in violation of the 1891 law. In the first cases brought to trial, the U.S. courts narrowly interpreted the penalty provisions of the Immigration Act. Consequently, all suits against the steamship companies for the carriage of diseased passengers were dismissed.¹⁰

Congress remedied this deficiency in the Immigration Act of 1903. This law imposed a one hundred dollar fine on the shipping companies for each alien with a "loathsome or dangerous contagious disease" transported, when a thorough physical examination abroad would have detected the presence of the disease. Presumably, this legislation persuaded the steamship companies to see that the emigrant exams were performed with greater care. Although in the years following the passage of the 1903 act, the shipping lines never totally escaped payment of these penalties, their fines never reached extraordinary proportions. Generally, they averaged around \$30,000 per annum, indicating that no more than three hundred obviously diseased immigrants, out of the hundreds of thousands arriving each year, had slipped through the hands of the European inspectors.¹¹

Failure to pass these medical exams traumatized not only the rejected immigrant, but his or her entire family. Having traveled all the way from Berditchev or Bialystock, Warsaw or Grodno, the East European Jews had already staked so much just in reaching Hamburg, Antwerp, or Liverpool. The only thing worse than suffering rejection at one of these ports was to be turned back at the very portals of America, at Ellis Island.

Aware that the emigrants created terrible scenes when told that they could not sail for America, officials in the seaports often tried to isolate the rejected emigrants before breaking the news. In Bremen, for example, the examining physicians handed a

card to all those they rejected. The unsuspecting emigrants, confident that they had passed the medical exam, returned to their lodgings. Only there did an interpreter explain the real meaning of the doctor's card. One eyewitness described the emigrants' reactions to the news as ranging from "dumb despair to frightful hysterics, during which the condition of the mind nearly approached that of insanity."¹²

In Bremen and Hamburg, those prevented from embarking for dangerous or loathsome diseases had their passage money refunded and were immediately deported to the border stations of their countries of origin. But in these cities less seriously ill emigrants could try to pass the medical examinations once again. Those detained for relatively minor ailments, such as eczema, could remain for treatment at their own expense or under the auspices of the German Jewish philanthropies.¹³

In other seaports rejected emigrants with means could stay while undergoing treatment for even serious illnesses. In Liverpool and Antwerp, for example, local "doctors" touted a variety of cures for trachoma. These methods included applying adrenalin to the eyes to blanch the conjunctivitis long enough to fool the medical inspectors. Other "doctors" rubbed blue stones on the eyes of their patients -- presumably to relieve the redness -- often using the same stone on hundreds of victims. Emigrants spent innumerable funds and many months of waiting trying these remedies. Not only did they run the risk of repeated infections from such unsanitary

procedures, but even worse these treatments often aggravated their conditions causing blindness. But for rejected emigrants with enough money, another alternative existed. They could turn to agents who for the right price would attempt to smuggle even the most diseased immigrant into North America.¹⁴

But the option of trying to pass the medical exam a second time did not mitigate the trauma of rejection. The following accounts convey the utter despair of these emigrants. The first passage by Sholem Aleichem examines the situation in a seriocomic fashion which, despite its lighthearted style, conveys the gravity of the moment. In the second selection one senses that even immigration commissioner Terence V. Powderly, who had already witnessed to much immigrant suffering, was greatly moved by the plight of a young Jewish woman, detained in Liverpool, while the rest of her family traveled on to the States.

The doctor examines them and finds they are all hale and hearty and can go to America, but she, that is Goldele, cannot go, because she has trachomas on her eyes. At first her family did not understand. Only later did they realize it. That meant that they could all go to America but she, Goldele, would have to remain here, in Antwerp. So there began a wailing, a weeping, a moaning. Three times her mamma fainted. Her papa wanted to stay here, but he couldn't. All the ship tickets would be lost. So they had to go off to America and leave her, Goldele, here until the trachomas would go away from her eyes.

Earthly belongings sold, home ties severed, and, after a long, tedious journey by rail and sea, found afflicted with disease, denied the right to proceed further with her kinfolk, deprived of the company and care of those nearest and dearest

to her, penniless, friendless and alone in a strange land and among strangers. I will never forget her agonized, pleading look as she took her seat preparatory to parting from her loved ones.¹⁵

Their journey at an end, the rejected Jewish emigrants stood on the sidelines as their brethren - fortunate enough both to have overcome the obstacles of the journey from Eastern Europe to the seaports and to have passed the exclusionary examinations - cast off for America. In the ports ringing the North Atlantic and especially in Liverpool, Hamburg, and Bremen, the East European Jews eagerly awaited the moment when at last they were told that their ship had arrived. Their eagerness, however, was tempered by trepidation, for all had already heard of the many trials that they had yet to endure as they journeyed to America in steamship steerage.

"Steerage" originally referred to those compartments positioned near the ship's rudder or steering apparatus. Eventually, however, steerage came to designate the lowest class of passenger accommodations on board any vessel. No observer of the steerage would ever deny that a voyage to America in steamship steerage was vastly preferable to a similar passage aboard a sailing ship. Without question the introduction of trans-Atlantic steam passage in the mid-nineteenth century had obviated some of the worst evils found in the steerages of the sailing vessels. Yet, while the advent of steamships had eliminated some of the horrors commonly associated with steerage travel, it had not ameliorated all of the inhuman

conditions associated with the steerage passage. The following description of an eighteenth century trans-Atlantic crossing mirrors in many ways reports of the same journey in steamship steerage.

During the voyage there is on board these ships terrible misery, stench, fumes, horror, vomiting and many kinds of seasickness . . . Add to this want of provisions, hunger, thirst, frost, heat, dampness, anxiety . . . When the ship is constantly tossed from side to side by the storm and waves, so that no one can either walk, or sit, or lie, and the closely packed people in the berths are thereby tumbled over each other, both the sick and the well -- it will be readily understood that many of these people, none of whom had been prepared for hardships, suffer so terribly . . .¹⁶

Scientific and technological developments in the second half of the nineteenth century had effected significant improvements in the passenger accommodations afforded by trans-Atlantic vessels. As a result, "shorter voyages, increased space, improved accommodations, more light, better ventilation, [and] more abundant supplies of more wholesome food and water" characterized "modern" steamships. Engine operated air pumps ventilated the steerage, cutting through the thick atmosphere, the "stench," and the "fumes" omnipresent in the lower decks. And the speed at which these steamships could travel, crossing the ocean in one to two weeks, not the one to three months necessary for sailing vessels, had enabled the stocking of fresh food and water sufficient for the duration of the voyage. The advances meant that passengers aboard steamship steerages did not risk their lives in setting forth for America.

Whereas typhus, dysentery, scurvy, and food poisoning had felled hundreds of travelers crossing the Atlantic in the holds of the sailing ships, steamship steerage passengers were by and large spared such miserable deaths.¹⁷

But despite these reforms, many noxious conditions still prevailed aboard steamship steerages. In fact, the very scientific progress that had made possible the modernization of these steerages had actually created a new set of problems. In 1907, the anonymous digester of the "Reports of the Immigration Commission on Conditions Affecting Emigration," recognized this. Having reviewed reports from the immigration officers along with special data collected by U.S. steamboat inspectors, he concluded that the same technology, which had allowed for the salutary changes in steerage, had also enabled the construction of gigantic vessels capable of cramming thousands of people into their holds.

While extensive claims are made in favor of modern steerage accommodations, it is open to serious doubt whether the overcrowding of the so-called "improved steerage quarters," does not more than offset every advantage afforded by vessels of modern construction. Even a novice could satisfy himself, with little investigation, that neither cleanliness, decency, nor comfort is possible under the existing conditions, to say nothing of the more important question of safety in case of disaster, when as sometimes happens, from two to three thousand persons are crowded into a space hardly sufficient to accommodate twelve hundred. As a matter of fact, steerage passengers cannot, with any degree of truth or justice, be said to be humanely or properly treated at any stage of their long and painful journey.

While it was true that steamship steerage passengers enjoyed the benefits of a speedy voyage, authorities on the steerage passage

had concluded that little significant change had occurred in the care and accommodating of these passengers since the days of the sailing vessels. Increased capacity had not meant more space for the steerage passengers; it had meant more passengers. Thus, despite the numerous technological improvements in ship construction, overcrowded steerages with their attendant problems remained the norm.¹⁸

One Yiddish emigration guidebook prepared its readers for the journey to America in steamship steerage warning that the crossing was "a kind of hell that cleanses a man of his sins before coming to the land of Columbus." At the end of his voyage in his first letter home from America, another Jewish immigrant concurred. "I do not like to say much about the steerage, but it is terrible there." Throughout the period of the mass East European Jewish emigration, the conditions in most steerages remained terrible. In 1908, U.S. immigration inspector Anna Herkner found the steerage "a congestion so intense, so injurious to health and morals that there is nothing on land to equal it." Surely, Sami Silverman spoke for many emigrants who traveled this way when he wrote of his journey to America some eighty years before, "I will never forget this trip as long as I live. DON'T ASK."¹⁹

The emigrants' first contact with the ship conveyed some sense of the problems that they would encounter during their crossing. As the passengers struggled up the gangplank, encumbered with their baggage, a scene of the "wildest commotion" confronted them. While

sailors loaded the ship, officers shouted, children cried, and steamers sailed past sounding their whistles, one or even two thousand or more steerage passengers of different nationalities swarmed on deck. The emigrants tried, amidst derricks swinging cargo on board, to locate their compartments, secure berths, and get hold of the blankets and utensils that would serve them during the voyage. As usual, Mary Antin has left behind a wonderfully vivid sketch of her first impression of the ship. "I only remember from that moment, that I had only one care till all became quiet; not to lose hold of my sister's hand. Everything else can be told in one word - noise."²⁰

The noise, the tumult, and the confusion that had stupefied Mary Antin on the open deck surrounded the emigrants throughout their voyage in steamship steerage. Indeed the physical accommodations furnished the steerage passengers made any other situation inconceivable. In 1882, the United States statute, "An Act to Regulate the Carriage of Passengers by Sea," mandated minimum standards for oceanic passenger transport. Most steerages granted the emigrants no more.²¹

In compliance with the 1882 Passenger Act, the steerage decks were divided into compartments, so that single men, single women, and families traveling together slept in separate areas. Partitions between these compartments afforded little privacy, however, since they frequently were left unlocked. Lined with berths arranged in double tiers, each section could hold several hundred people at a

time. The "barnlike" facilities, as one traveler aptly characterized them, served the passengers as their sleeping and sitting rooms, and on some ships even as their dining areas. The design of these large apartments served another purpose, for when the berths were removed, they could easily hold cargo. Since these compartments were already equipped with ventilating systems, the cargo stored in these areas was usually livestock. Many steerages actually carried passengers on their western runs and returned to Europe with cattle boarded in the very same "pens" that the passengers had used.²²

In outfitting these compartments, the steerages again complied with the letter of the Passenger Act of 1882. This law had addressed the issue of berths, their dimensions, placement, and number to insure that each ship had sufficient places to sleep each passenger individually. While these regulations had stopped the practice of accommodating extra passengers in hammocks hung in the little open space available in the steerage, they had failed to require other amenities for the travelers. For example, shipping lines were not obliged to provide bedding, blankets, or pillows for the steerage passengers. The English companies, including Cunard, expected those traveling in steerage to bring their own bedding or to do without. While the German lines did furnish bedding as part of the steerage fare, those emigrants sailing from Hamburg or Bremen received a burlap bag filled with straw for a mattress and a life jacket for a pillow. The jute cloth that served as a blanket was

so thin that passengers had to retire fully dressed in order to keep warm. This was just as well, since steerage afforded no privacy for changing clothes before retiring. In fact, steerage passengers not only lacked enclosed dressing areas, they also lacked storage space. This forced steerage travelers to share their berths with their hand baggage, extra clothing, towels, soap, and even food and eating utensils. On stormy days when all were confined to their berths while water seeped in through the hatchways and ceiling, the sleeping quarters became excessively dismal, damp, and dirty.²³

In fact, the steerage quarters were dirty most of the time. Old steerage accommodations hardly fostered cleanliness. The crowding of so many people into such a small space made it difficult, if not impossible, to keep the area clean without constant vigilance. And since the ships' crews displayed no diligence in cleaning the steerage, these areas were more often than not filthy to an extreme. Although the crew did sweep the steerage floors during the crossing, such minimum care could not keep the compartments clean. Since no sick cans or waste receptacles stood in the steerage, all garbage and refuse ended up on the floor. On at least one North German Lloyd ship, the steerage steward actually aggravated the problem since he sold food from his private stock as he worked his way through the quarters. By the time he had finished sweeping the steerage, the floor was once again littered with eggshells, orange peels, apple cores, and crumbs -- the

refuse of his larder.²⁴

The Passenger Act of 1882 did require that all areas used by passengers "be kept at all times in a clean and healthy condition." But U.S. port officials, who boarded these ships only at landing, had difficulty enforcing this provision since most captains ordered a thorough cleaning of the steerage just prior to docking. Consequently, these inspections in no way revealed the true conditions on board the vessel during the voyage. In fact, one investigator of steerage conditions concluded that these last minute efforts at cleaning were deliberately ordered just to mislead the inspectors of customs.²⁵

The reports of special Immigration Commission inspectors who examined the steerages of vessels landing at U.S. ports in the fall of 1906, found many steerages "reasonably clean" in light of the numbers of people berthed there. But so many reports from steerage investigators, port officers, and emigration inspectors complained of filthy compartments, washrooms, and lavatories, that it is clear that these conditions remained far from uncommon into the twentieth century. Even in 1906, one immigration inspector could still write of the steerage accommodations, this time referring to the British S.S. Merion, "A cattle pen could not have presented a more disgusting sight."²⁶

And unfortunately, the same often had to be said for the pen's inhabitants. The accommodations furnished the steerage passengers made any other state of affairs unimaginable. An examination of

steerages, conducted in 1873, had disclosed that some vessels made no washrooms available for the use of the steerage passengers. While emigrants traveling in the decades closer to the turn of the twentieth century did not have to endure this indignity, the washrooms and lavatories designated for the steerage were often grossly inadequate, too small, and too few in number to accommodate all on board. On the S.S. Rugia the steerage men's washroom held only four washbasins. Yet, this Hamburg vessel carried 1,089 passengers. Such insufficient facilities meant constant overcrowding in these bathrooms. Anna Herkner claimed that she had to get up by 5:00 A.M. in order to get a chance to use the women's washroom before the 7:00 A.M. breakfast bell. ²⁷

Not only were the steerage washrooms congested and deficient, but they also provided none of the luxuries cabin passengers received. If steerage emigrants wanted soap and towels, they had to supply their own. Most washrooms boasted a single warm water tap, but it was often not operative, and when it worked, it was lukewarm at best. Consequently, most steerage passengers used cold salt water to wash everything from laundry and dirty dishes to children and hair. Not only did these lavatories offer no place for private bathing, but on some ships men and women actually shared the same washrooms. When two to three days before landing everyone renewed the struggle to keep clean, the congestion in the washrooms became impossible. One steerage investigator concluded, "All the human and physical needs were so miserably provided for,

or else entirely ignored, that it was not at all strange if the passengers developed and showed some animal propensities."²⁸

Not surprisingly, this commotion spilled over into mealtime, where the emigrants were served as one traveler put it, "à la mob." The Passenger Act of 1882 required the provision of tables and seats for the regular use of steerage passengers at meals. But since the law said nothing about how many tables and chairs a ship had to have, U.S. port inspectors complained that they could take no actions against steamships which stinted steerage passengers in this way. Those tables that were furnished were usually set up in the middle of the sleeping areas. Generally, only if a compartment was completely unoccupied, did the steerage passengers have a separate dining room. If the steerage was full, the emigrants might even eat standing at shelves lining the walls of the compartments or at boards set on trestles in the middle of the sleeping areas. But, because of the foul air in these confined spaces, whenever the weather permitted, most passengers preferred to eat on the open deck. And when they did take their meals below, without enough places to seat all passengers at once and with no provision for two seatings, disorder reigned.²⁹

On some ships women and children traveling in steerage were actually seated and then served by stewards at tables. More often, however, steerage passengers got their own food. The emigrants formed small groups. One representative from each group then fetched the meal from the food troughs and carried it in pails

back to the group. Anyone who dared to be late for dinner risked getting nothing to eat.³⁰

The quality of this food varied. Polly Adler, who later became a famous New York madam, sailed alone as a teenager from Bremen in 1914. She wrote, "The food served in steerage was not as good as we gave our animals back in Yanow." Others reported that the food was "fair in quality and sufficient in quantity," but wretchedly prepared. Often the passengers found only white bread, potatoes, and soup truly edible. The meats and fish reeked. The vegetables were of a "queer, unanalyzable mixture," and the stewed fruit seemed more like the refuse of edible fruit. It was not unusual for the passengers to throw much of the food overboard. They relied for as long as possible on the private stores that they had brought with them. When those ran out, they bought food that the ship's crew had either filched from the better provisions carried for the cabin passengers or that had been purchased for the steerage, but was never served to them.³¹

For devout Jewish emigrants the poor quality of the available food was an inconsequential problem when compared with the paramount issue of whether or not the food served on shipboard was kosher. Traditional Jews are bound by the ritual laws of kashrut to observe dietary restrictions which prohibit the eating of numerous foods and which require careful supervision of the preparation of most others. These restrictive laws have set off Jews from their gentile neighbors for centuries and have coincidentally encumbered the

lives of Jewish travelers throughout the ages. The friends and relatives who had accompanied the Antins to the station well knew that the voyage would test Mrs. Antin's rigid determination to obey these laws. As they saw it, the choices were clear. The Antins would either eat trefah (unkosher food) on the way to America or starve before they ever landed there.³²

These Jews of Plotzk hardly exaggerated. For although Jewish law obliges Jews to eat non-kosher food in order to survive when no kosher food is available, pious Jewish emigrants, who had held fast to these laws their entire lives, did not readily abandon kashrut. In fact, as long as the Jewish emigrants remained on land, they did not have to. Since Biblical times Jews have accepted the obligation to provide sustenance for the wayfarers in their midst. In modern times this meant that East European Jews encountered little problem in obtaining kosher food from the local Jewish communities wherever they stopped on their way across Europe. But the sea voyage proved another matter.³³

Pious Jews confined to a ship at sea either carried their own provisions, prayed for a bona fide kosher kitchen on board, or subsisted on certain pareve (neutral) foods considered permissible. The Jewish emigrants prepared for the trip by baking hundreds of kuchlech, cookies made of flour, sugar, and water. They expected these to sustain them unless the ship boasted an authentic kosher kitchen. If it did not, they would supplement their diet as necessary from the steerage galley with the permissible foods of

tea, hardboiled eggs, herring, and oranges.³⁴

Not all captains, however, were willing to oblige Jewish emigrants with these special provisions. On one ship the kosher food that the observant Jews had brought with them ran out ten days into their seventeen day voyage. When the Jewish passengers requested herring which would permit them to continue to observe the dietary laws of kashrut, the captain flew into a rage. Calling the Jews barbarians, the master of this ship announced that if the Jews did not want his food, they could throw it into the sea. Seven days later the devout emigrants finally landed, exhausted and famished.³⁵

The near starvation of these Jewish passengers holds the key to one of the most unexpected developments in this account of steerage -- the appearance of legitimate kosher kitchens on board many steamships. With so many observant Jewish passengers crossing the ocean, the shipping lines, competing for the Jewish business, made efforts to accommodate the special needs of these travelers. For example, many steerages grouped Jews together even when other nationalities did not receive similar consideration. While this measure may on the one hand be viewed as discriminatory segregation, especially since in some cases Jewish passengers received the least desirable compartments, on the other hand it facilitated the Jewish rituals of daily prayer and the observance of the Sabbath, holidays, and the laws of kashrut. This segregation enabled Jewish passengers to pray, sleep, and eat in compartments uncontaminated by the presence of forbidden foods. In setting aside one of the steerage

galley solely for the preparation of kosher food, the shipping lines continued this policy of accommodating -- this time wittingly -- the Jewish passengers in order to attract their business.³⁶

However, the shipping companies did not of their own accord simply decide to establish kosher kitchens. American and European Jewish community officials actively lobbied with the steamship lines for the provision of kosher food for the Jewish passengers. These leaders argued that Jews landing at Ellis Island, weakened from not having had cooked food nor meat for the entire crossing, risked rejection by the American authorities as unfit to immigrate. Since the steamship companies well knew who paid the costs of the return voyage for debarred immigrants, these Jewish representatives proved fairly successful in persuading the shipping companies to make provisions for kosher cooking.³⁷

It has been impossible to determine just when kosher kitchens actually appeared on steamships. A reference indicates that a vessel -- either sail or steam -- left Hamburg in 1852 equipped with a kosher kitchen. When he sailed with Am Olam, a group that proposed founding an agricultural colony, to America in 1882, Israel Kasovich found kosher provisions on board. But since the Am Olam club comprised half the passengers on that ship, this may have been a special case. Certainly, by the 1890's, before they had even left Eastern Europe, the Jewish emigrants knew that some ships had kosher kitchens. But whether or not they would travel on a vessel equipped with one, they did not know. And once on

board, even if the captain said the food was kosher, extremely cautious pious Jews doubted his knowledge of these complex laws and avoided eating any prepared foods.³⁸

While Jewish passengers may have been segregated in the compartments and may have had their food prepared separately from that of the other passengers -- although with the exception of the meat, the kosher kitchen used the regular steerage provisions -- in other aspects the Jewish travelers' experience of the steerage differed little from the other passengers. Basically, the steerage offered all its passengers, Jews and non-Jews, the same substandard accommodations. Not only were the compartments overcrowded and the meals inedible, but steerage medical provisions were dangerously deficient. The 1882 Passenger Act required all steamships to have two infirmaries, a physician, and medicines on board. But the steerage hospitals were so blatantly ill-equipped to handle the numbers in transit that only four years after passage of this law, the American Medical Association deemed an amendment essential to safeguard the lives of emigrants at sea.³⁹

While at first glance the steerage hospitals appeared satisfactory -- their beds made up with sheets; running water, latrines, and sick cans nearby -- only when ill passengers tried to gain access to the hospitals did they discover their shortcomings. Generally, the sick bay remained locked unless the stewardess, who also acted as a nurse, was below deck. While compliance with the Passenger Act required the stocking of "medicines proper and

necessary for diseases and accidents incident to sea-voyages," these were not usually available in the steerage hospitals. When needed, the stewardess had to fetch them at her convenience from the "drug store" located on one of the upper decks. Even hot water had to be carried by hand down from the cabins. While most often the emigrants complained of seasickness, this malady did not even qualify them to use the hospital. Only with great reluctance would the steerage "nurse" summon the doctor from the cabin. And when he did come, his brusque manner showed how he regarded this class of passengers.⁴⁰

Emigrants with a bit of extra money did manage to mitigate some of the unpleasanteries of the sea voyage. Bribes, properly distributed to the steerage stewards, ships' doctors, cooks, and even the petty officers, could buy semi-private accommodations, in the otherwise little used infirmaries, and the same food served to the cabin passengers. But even those emigrants who could afford to pay for special treatment were not necessarily spared the abuse commonly meted out to the steerage passengers. U.S. investigators posing as emigrants expressed shock over the brutality that they saw in the steerages. When such violence took place between passengers, the investigators were astounded that no sailor or steward intervened. But these inspectors quickly discovered that more often mistreatment of the steerage passengers came, not from the ruffians traveling with the emigrants, but from the bullies sailing with the crew.⁴¹

Emigrants suffered all kinds of physical abuse at the hands of the crew. They were poked with sticks, punched, and slapped; they had their clothing torn and their baggage destroyed; and they were cursed, shoved, and kicked. Minor incidents easily antagonized the sailors. An emigrant struggling with her baggage; one who failed to take his hat off before an officer; a seasick passenger who moved slowly; or one who did not understand directions delivered in a foreign language -- all these were singled out for blows. Some sailors considered the steerage an "unpleasant fact" and its passengers "inferior beings." At times they took their cue from their immediate superiors, who were characterized by an observer as "harsh, overbearing, discourteous, and neglectful."⁴²

Certainly, not all emigrants met such brutality. On some ships the passengers signed testimonials thanking the captain and crew for their care. On others emigrants made friends with sailors who taught them English or who favored the children. If diligent, the ships' officers could discipline their crew and demand fair, if not courteous, treatment of the steerage passengers. In fact, reports of port inspectors, specifically detailed to examine steerage conditions in the fall of 1906, failed to find any passengers who complained of ill-treatment.⁴³

Yet, the absence of such complaints in the records of these officials does not necessarily indicate a similar absence of maltreatment of the steerage passengers on these ships. It is possible that by the fall of 1906, ships' crews behaved with

greater courtesy towards the emigrants. It is more likely, however, that the emigrants saw no reason to complain about the harsh treatment which they found little worse than what they had endured at the hands of agents, smugglers, border police, and other officials.

Moreover, the emigrants had nothing to gain by complaining to the port inspectors who questioned them. Broughton Brandenburg, the investigative reporter who crossed the Atlantic twice in steerage, appreciated the emigrants' wariness of all uniformed authorities from sailor to immigration officers:

I soon realized that what makes the emigrant so meek in the face of outrageous brutalities, so open to the wiles of sharpers, so thoroughly disconcerted and bewildered in the face of an examination, is his terrible dread of not being allowed to enter America. He would as soon think of cutting off a hand as doing anything that would get him in trouble.

The ordeal of the journey at an end, what immigrant would dare to stir up trouble by revealing mistreatment at sea.⁴⁴

The blows of physical brutality menaced all immigrants. Women, however, faced the added threat of sexual abuse. With so many girls and women traveling alone, many found that their lack of a male companion made them obvious targets. Certainly, unescorted immigrant women encountered sexual harassment both in Europe and in America. But on shipboard where hundreds, if not thousands, of passengers and crew were jammed together, manhandling of the female passengers became on some vessels an open sport.⁴⁵

Bored with the monotony of life at sea, male passengers discovered that common steamship steerage practices gave them ready

access to the unescorted women. When the women were lodged in compartments that did not lock; when the steerage bar bordered on their quarters; when the ventilator shafts in the men's compartment enabled them to peer into the women's berths; when the ship's daily mileage was posted only in the women's compartment; when unrelated men and women shared the same sleeping space -- the women became easy marks. Theoretically, the female passengers could have demanded protection from assault of the ships' stewards and crew. But to do so meant appealing to some of the worst offenders of the steerage women.⁴⁶

In Against Our Will: Men, Women, and Rape, Susan Brownmiller concluded,

All rape is an exercise in physical power, but some rapists have an edge that is more than physical. They operate within an institutionalized setting that works to their advantage and in which a victim has little chance to redress her grievance.

Brownmiller considered police rape "the ultimate nightmare of rape by the ultimate authority charged with the duty of protection." On shipboard the figures of authority were the crew, stewards, and officers. And sometimes instead of protecting the steerage women, they sexually harassed them.⁴⁷

This in no way implies that on all ships the crew assaulted the women. Many officers and stewards accepted the serious responsibility of protecting the women passengers. They successfully disciplined their crews and expelled intruders from the women's

compartments. But substantial evidence indicates that on some vessels the ships' employees harassed the female passengers with impunity.⁴⁸

Although the Passenger Act of 1882 prohibited the crews from frequenting the compartments except when on duty, sailors freely passed through the women's compartment at any hour, even when the women were dressing. Not content merely to leer, they stopped to punch and handle the female passengers. Elsewhere on the ship the steerage women and crew were placed in close proximity. They shared the same open deck for recreation. On some vessels, including the S.S. Prinzessin Irene, the washrooms of the crew and of the steerage women adjoined one another. With the doors to both rooms thrown wide open, naked men washed in full view of the women and children.⁴⁹

Any woman left alone below while the others were up on deck risked the ultimate outrage of rape. Anna Herkner, who had seen the chief steerage steward attempt to rape a Polish emigrant, wrote of her journey,

I can not say that any woman lost her virtue on this passage, but in making free with the women, the men of the crew went as far as possible without exposing themselves to the danger of punishment. But this limit is no doubt frequently overstepped.

Herkner claimed that "not one young woman in the steerage escaped attack," including herself.⁵⁰

The women fought back as best they could. They bonded together. They guarded one another. They returned blows and resorted to fighting with pins and teeth. But the atmosphere of lawlessness and disrespect demoralized them. As in Brownmiller's assessment of police rape, sexual harassment on shipboard became a nightmare perpetrated by the authorities charged with the duty of protection. And apparently, this nightmare continued throughout the era of migration. Even in 1914, an investigator for the U.S. Bureau of Immigration again decried the lack of enforcement of the law barring the crew from the steerage compartments.⁵⁰

Relations between the passengers also ran the gamut of human emotions from camaraderie to extreme tension. Jewish passengers eased each other's loneliness as they shared the rituals of prayer and their first holiday celebrations held away from home. They found intellectual companionship in discussions about the Haskalah (Enlightenment). They supported one another as they faced the difficulties of the voyage together. Some even formed friendships that would last long after they had landed. But beneath this romantic picture of shipboard fellowship lay darker undercurrents.⁵²

With so many people of so many different nationalities crammed together, tempers easily flared. And when they did, the dividing lines of tension often ran along ethnic lines. On a Russian ship several Ukrainian passengers jeered at a group of Jews chanting their Sabbath prayers. Other Jewish emigrants responded -- with their fists. On an English vessel a fight erupted between Irish

and Jewish emigrants after an Irish mischief-maker tried to cut the ropes on one of the steerage hammocks with its Jewish occupant still in it. When Balkan emigrants on board a North German Lloyd ship threw Jewish passengers out of their berths, a knife fight ensued. In each case only the intervention of the ship's officers and their careful vigilance thereafter prevented further violence.⁵³

Partly as a result of these tensions in which ethnic hatreds flared, on some ships the Jewish philanthropies posted guardians. These Jewish guardians not only supervised the preparation of the kosher food, but they also made sure that Jewish steerage passengers received equitable treatment in all matters. In the eyes of the shipping companies, however, these shomrim (guards) were sometimes unwelcome guests. In one case a guardian's public complaints about maltreatment of the steerage passengers on North German Lloyd ships resulted in the termination of his position. Evidence about these officials is so sketchy that it may be assumed that because of similar difficulties, the shomrim were infrequent guests on board.⁵⁴

But not all Jewish emigrants who sailed to America in steerage needed protection from the indignities of the steerage; for by the beginning of the twentieth century a new type of steerage had evolved. The horrors of "old steerage" have already been described. But on some of the North European lines a "new steerage" or third class passage appeared.⁵⁵

The new steerage "differed but slightly from the usual cabin passage, except in plainness and simplicity of appointment." In

new steerage emigrants slept in semi-private staterooms that accommodated two to eight passengers. Here the travelers no longer shared their berths with their hand baggage, towels, and eating utensils. Instead these compartments provided space for luggage, hooks for extra clothing, a mirror and washstand, and sometimes even a place to sit. Sufficient openings for air had improved ventilation to some degree, and electric lights illuminated the compartment and hallways. With adequate washroom facilities furnished with towels and soap, and baths and showers available for a fee, the emigrants arrived in America little worse for their journey.⁵⁶

In new steerage consideration for the passengers prevailed. A bell in the staterooms summoned the matron for those too sick to leave their berths. The ship's crew cleaned all public and private areas daily, or more often if required. Stewards served meals in dining rooms with multiple sittings accommodating all passengers. The food was "such as might be eaten without hesitation by anyone." Perhaps influenced by the improved physical accommodations, new steerage crews behaved more respectfully towards the immigrants. They no longer freely intermingled with passengers. In fact, in order to insure passenger security, disciplined stewards patrolled the halls day and night. Even entertainment had been considered with a piano in the dining hall offering musical diversion. Everything was thus designed for the passengers' safety and comfort.⁵⁷

While British vessels seem to have eventually gone over completely to third class accommodations for all steerage passengers, that was not true for the other lines. Twentieth century German ships, for example, included small third class sections, but continued to accommodate the bulk of their passengers in old steerage. The Hamburg-American Amerika held 220 in third class, but 2,000 traveled in its fourth class steerage. Keeping in mind that both types of steerage existed at the same time, the emigration historian Philip Taylor concluded,

There is no way of estimating the proportion of emigrants who traveled under the two main sets of conditions here described . . . It seems reasonable to guess, therefore, that old steerage accommodated a substantial majority

There is no reason to dispute Taylor's assumption. On the contrary the evidence studied corroborated his thesis that most emigrants, or at least those motivated to write about their journeys, crossed the ocean in old steerage.⁵⁸

What caused the development of new steerage remains unclear. One investigator attributed the innovation to economic competition. If so, perhaps new steerage represented an attempt by the British lines to entice continental passengers, including the East European Jews, to bypass their German competitors and travel via England. The advent of new steerage enabled the British lines to promise improved shipboard accommodations as well as cheaper fares to America. When the German companies, however, instituted third class accommodations, they were not intended for all travelers.

The new steerages of the Hamburg-American and North German Lloyd lines were designed to accommodate a so-called better class of passengers, namely Germans and Austrians. HAPAG's policy of refusing to sell Russians third class tickets showed the company's determination to maintain the elite character of its third class and revealed its firm intention to preserve the old steerage as the basic form of mass transport.⁵⁹

In the years before World War I cut off the tide of emigration, the German companies continued to build ships with large old style steerages. Old steerage thus remained the most important mode of emigrant transport because it enabled the steamship companies to carry the greatest number of passengers at the least possible cost. Whereas cabin passengers paid two to four times the steerage fare, cabin class accommodations cost the steamship companies perhaps six times more than the board of a steerage passenger. Cabin passengers expected "to be coddled, fed on delicacies, guarded against draughts, lifted from deck to deck and nursed with gentle care." But for their fares, the emigrants in steerage received only 1 percent of the sheltered deck space, 10 percent of the food value, and the minimum legal requirements of personal space in the compartments below. When considering the accommodations afforded the steerage passengers, emigration observers concluded that these travelers paid proportionately much more for their passage than did the cabin passengers and that in carrying the steerage traffic, the steamship companies made their greatest profits.⁶⁰

While some emigrants enjoyed the comparative luxury of the new steerage, the following picture painted by the veteran traveler Anna Herkner summarized the typical emigrant journey to America by steam.

During these twelve days in the steerage I lived in a disorder and in surroundings that offended every sense. Only the fresh breeze from the sea overcame the sickening odors. The vile language of the men, the screams of the women defending themselves, the crying of the children, wretched because of their surroundings, and practically every sound that reached the ear, irritated beyond endurance. There was no sight before which the eye did not prefer to close. Everything was dirty, sticky, and disagreeable to the touch. Every impression was offensive. Worse than this was the general air of immorality. For fifteen hours each day I witnessed all around me this improper, indecent, and forced mingling of men and women who were total strangers and often did not understand one word of the same language. People cannot live in such surroundings and not be influenced.⁶¹

The East European Jews who crossed the Atlantic in steerage was fortunate. They had managed the long journey from Eastern Europe, and the authorities had pronounced them fit to immigrate to America. But the hardships of the journey in steamship steerage took their toll. The overcrowding, the close quarters, the foul air below, the dirt, noise, and tumult, the lack of decent accommodations, and the physical brutality tried the emigrants-in-transit. Worries about kashrut and antagonisms with other emigrant groups increased the tensions for the East European Jews. While some travelers enjoyed the comparative luxury of the new steerage, most transmigrants, including the Jews, endured the privations of

the crossing in old steerage. Their journey to America by steam at an end, the East European Jews had yet to discover, as did all emigrants, that the difficult transmigration had merely set the stage for the years of hardship and struggle that awaited the immigrants in the New World.

Notes

- 1 United States, 61st Congress, 3rd session, 1910-11. Senate Document 748 (Congressional serial set volume 5870): Reports of the Immigration Commission on Emigration Conditions in Europe, p. 69; U.S., 43rd Cong. 1st sess., 1874. Senate Executive Document 23 (serial 1580): Steerage Passengers on Emigrant Vessels, pp. 109-10.
- 2 For a brief history of U.S. immigration legislation, see supra, pp. 24-26. National Archives, Record Group 59, T184, Despatches from U.S. Consuls at Bremen; No. 52, Despatch of Hugo M. Starkoff, 2 August 1892, discusses the inspection procedures implemented by the North German Lloyd Line.
- 3 U.S., 52nd Cong., 1st sess., 1892. House Exec. Doc. 235 (serial 2957): Enforcement of Alien Contract Labor, Part I, p. 268; Immigration Act of 1893, ch. 206, secs. 2, 3, 27 United States Statutes at Large 569; Quarantine Law of 13 February 1893, 27 Stat. 449; Sen. Doc. 748 (serial 5870): pp. 75-76.
- 4 The role played by U.S. Consular officials and their deputies in conducting the examinations of the emigrants abroad varied greatly. In the Italian ports physicians of the U.S. Public Health and Marine Service actually examined all steerage passengers. Conversely, in Antwerp, the Belgian government refused to let U.S. medical officers play any role in the inspection process. Sen. Doc. 748 (serial 5870): p. 77; Immigration Act of 1891, ch. 551, sec. 1, 26 Stat. 1084.
- 5 Sen. Doc. 748 (serial 5870): pp. 71-72; Sholem Aleichem, The Adventures of Mottel, the Cantor's Son (New York, 1953).

- 6 NA, RG 85, 51411/1 Digest of Reports of the Immigration Commission on Conditions Affecting Emigration, 1907, pp. 86, 92, 97; NA, RG 59, T184, No. 52; Sen. Doc. 748 (serial 5870): p. 98.
- 7 H. Exec. Doc. 235 (serial 2957): Part I, pp. 146-47; Part II, pp. 33-35; U.S., 58th Cong. 2d sess., 1904. H. doc. 732 (serial 4682): Special Consular Reports, Volume XXX: Emigration, p. 53; NA, RG 85, 51411/1, pp. 86-87.
- 8 U.S., 61st Cong. 3rd sess., 1910-11. Sen. Doc. 753 (serial 5877): Reports of the Immigration Commission on Steerage Conditions, Importation and Harboring of Women for Immoral Purposes, Immigrant Homes and Aid Societies, Immigrant Banks, p. 14; Stephen Graham, With Poor Immigrants to America (New York, 1914), pp. 11, 37-38; Broughton Brandenburg, Imported Americans (New York, 1904), pp. 164-65, 196. On exemptions for American citizens with recent vaccinations, see NA, RG 59, T184, no. 39, 1 June 1896.
- Not only did the vaccinations terrify the emigrants but even in 1907, some American authorities were still dubious about the procedure. Calling the smallpox serum "vile stuff," Immigration Commissioner Terence V. Powderly reflected, "It seems wrong to inject unhealthy matter, taken from a cow, into a healthy human being with a view to warding off a disease which the person hasn't got and may never have." NA, RG 85, 51411/51, Report of T.V. Powderly, 9 January 1907, pp. 30-32.
- 9 On the leniency of the exams, see Sen. Doc. 753 (serial 5877): p. 14; Graham, p. 10; H. Exec. Doc. 235 (serial 2957): Part I, p. 301; U.S. Department of Commerce and Labor, Bureau of Immigration. Annual Report of the Commissioner General of Immigration for Fiscal Year 1903-04. Doc. No. 24 (Washington, D.C., 1904), p. 127. The following sources indicate the opposite point of view: ARCGI for Fiscal 1902-03, p. 87; NA, RG 59, 6598/2, Letter, Consul William Thompson Fee, 18 May 1910; NA, RG 85, 51411/1, p. 92.
- 10 ARCGI for Fiscal 1903-04, p. 134; for Fiscal 1898-99, pp. 30-35.
- 11 Immigration Act of 1903, ch. 1012, sec. 9, 32 Stat. (1): 1213; In 1907, Congress imposed fines for the attempted landing of persons who were clearly idiots, imbeciles, or epileptics. Immigration Act of 1907, ch. 1134, sec. 2, 34 Stat. (1): 898; Sen. Doc. 748 (serial 5870): p. 74.

- 12 ARCGI for Fiscal 1903-04, pp. 132-33.
- 13 NA, RG 85, 51411/1, pp. 85, 93, 95; For assistance rendered by German Jewish philanthropies to the East European Jews with medical problems, see supra, pp. 128-29.
- 14 NA, RG 85, 51411/1, pp. 87, 102; Sholem Aleichem, "Off for the Golden Land," Jewish Immigration Bulletin (Feb. 1917), pp. 10-11; Brandenburg, pp. 165-67; On agents engaged in the smuggling of diseased aliens, see supra, pp. 67-69.
- 15 Aleichem, "Off for the Golden Land," p. 10; NA, RG 85, 51411/1, p. 89.
- 16 Webster's Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary (Springfield, Mass., 1963); Gottlieb Mittelberger, Journey to Pennsylvania in the Year 1750 and Return to Germany in the Year 1754 trans. by Carl T. Eben (Philadelphia, 1898), pp. 18-25, reprinted in Edith Abbott, Immigration: Select Documents and Case Records (Chicago, 1924), pp. 8-9.
- 17 Sen. Exec. Doc. 23 (serial 1580): p. 12 and pp. 11, 22, 181-83; supra., p.39, n.6; Maldwyn Allen Jones, American Immigration (Chicago, 1960), p. 185.
- 18 NA, RG 85, 51411/1, pp. 105-06.
- 19 George M. Price, Di Yuden in Amerika (Odessa, 1891), 14 f. quoted in Irving Howe, World of Our Fathers (New York, 1976), pp. 35-36, and in Moses Rischin, The Promised City: New York's Jews, 1870-1914 (Cambridge, Mass., 1962), p. 33; American Jewish Archives, Correspondence File, Immigrants and Immigration I, Letter from unknown author, 11 October 1875; The text of Anna Herkner's reports on her steerage investigations, printed in the U.S. Congressional Serial Set, omits the names of the ships on which she traveled; Sen. Doc. 753 (serial 5877): p. 10. A copy of the report in the National Archives indicates that she wrote this of the steerage aboard the North German Lloyd's Neckar; NA, RG 41, Bureau of Marine Inspection and Navigation, Correspondence Files, 48315, Report of Anna Herkner, 29 August 1908. Sam Silverman, I, Sami: 65 Years on the Road (Chicago, 1978), p. 38.

- 20 Mary Antin, From Plotzk to Boston (1899; rpt. Upper Saddle River, N.J., 1970), pp. 62-63; Brandenburg, pp. 27-28, 171-75; NA, RG 85, 51411/56, Report of Philip Cowen, 31 January 1907, p. 17.
- 21 Passenger Act of 1882, ch. 374, 22 Stat. 186. See supra, pp. 22-24 for a discussion of the standards set by this law.
- 22 Sen. Exec. Doc. 23 (serial 1580): pp. 54-55, 161-62, 181-83; Sen. Doc. 753 (serial 5877): pp. 6-7, 34; "Across the Atlantic: Steerage," Littell's Living Age, 190 (July 4, 1891), pp. 54-60.
- For examples of ships carrying freight - often cattle - and people in the same areas on different runs, see Sen. Exec. Doc. 23 (serial 1580): p. 76; U.S., 51st Cong., 2nd sess., 1891. H. Report 3472 (serial 2886): Report of the Joint Select Committee on Immigration and Naturalization: Immigration Investigation, pp. 195-98; H. Exec. Doc. 235 (serial 2957): Part I, p. 235; Israel Kasovich, The Days of Our Years trans. Maximilian Hurwitz (New York, 1929), p. 172; NA, RG 59, 861.56, "Misfortunes of Russian Emigrants," trans. from Novoe Vremya 5 May 1910. One can surmise that the term "steerage" may well have persisted because steers and people occupied the same area.
- 23 Sec. 2, 22 Stat. 186 (1882); Sen. Exec. Doc. 23 (serial 1580): p. 195; H. Rep. 3472 (serial 2886): pp. 418-25; Sen. Doc. 753 (serial 5877): pp. 7, 14, 34-35; "Across the Atlantic: Steerage;" Brandenburg, p. 175.
- 24 Sen. Exec. Doc. 23 (serial 1580): pp. 55, 132-34; Sen. Doc. 753 (serial 5877): pp. 7, 35.
- 25 Sec. 6, 22 Stat. 186 (1882); Sen. Doc. 753 (serial 5877): p. 8, 16; Sen. Exec. Doc. 23 (serial 1580): p. 12.
- 26 NA, RG 41, Bureau of Marine Inspection and Navigation, Bureau of Navigation, Correspondence Files, 3923-N, Part I, report 3 Sept. 1905; 61488-N, report 8 April 1912.
- 27 Sen. Exec. Doc. 23 (serial 1580): p. 197; Sen. Doc. 753 (serial 5877): pp. 8, 15-16, 37; H. Rep. 3472 (serial 2886): pp. 198-200.

- 28 Sen. Doc. 753 (serial 5877): pp. 7-8, 15-16, 37; H. Rep. 3472 (serial 2886): pp. 148-25; Brandenburg, p. 184.
- 29 Edward Steiner, From Alien to Citizen (New York, 1914), p. 38; Sen. Doc. 753 (serial 5877): pp. 8, 17-18; Sec. 4, 22 Stat. 186 (1882); NA, RG 41, 39232-N, Part II, Report 13 Sept. 1905; Part III, Report 21 Dec. 1906.
- 30 Sen. Doc. 753 (serial 5877): pp. 8-9, 18.
- 31 Polly Adler, A House is Not a Home (New York, 1953), p. 12; Sen. Doc. 753 (serial 5877): pp. 9, 17-18, 36; Brandenburg, 34, 180-85; Edward Steiner, On the Trail of the Immigrant (New York, 1906), p. 38; Sen. Exec. Doc. 23 (serial 1580): pp. 56, 197; H. Rep. 3472 (serial 2886): pp. 195-98; Boris Bogen, Born a Jew (New York, 1930), pp. 33-34.
- 32 Mark Zborowski and Elizabeth Herzog, Life is with People: The Culture of the Shtetl (New York, 1952), pp. 365-70; Mary Antin, The Promised Land (1912; rpt. Boston, 1969), p. 168.
- 33 The Jewish obligation to welcome travelers brings the host, whose table holds plenty for all, honor. This custom derives from Genesis 18:1-16 where Abraham's graciousness to three strangers was rewarded by God with the promise of a son. Jewish communities, inundated with their brethern from Eastern Europe, continued the custom of hosting the stranger by opening public kitchens which served kosher food; supra, p. 129. More than one emigrant resented the charitable manner in which this food was doled out; Bogen, pp. 32-33; Solomon Ornstein, My Sixty Years in America (New York, 1952), pp. 61-63. Nevertheless, as the Jewish emigrants traveled on land, kosher food remained comparatively accessible for those who wanted it.

It would be naive to suggest that all East European Jews required kosher provisions. Boris Bogen ran into trouble with the other Jewish steerage passengers when he ate non-kosher food; pp. 33-34. Others found that the strains of the journey led them to break with the Jewish tradition that had bound them in the shtetl; C. Davidson, Out of Endless Yearnings: A Memoir of Israel Davidson (New York, 1946), p. 14. Howe points out that the migration included many already secularized Jews who had abandoned the restrictive dietary laws back in Eastern Europe; pp. 57-63.

- 34 Samuel Chotzinoff, A Lost Paradise (New York, 1955), p. 40; Morris Raphael Cohen, A Dreamer's Journey (Glencoe, Illinois 1949), p. 18; Rischin, p. 33; AJA, Biographies File, Jacob I Marks, p. 106.
- Confinement to a ship at sea tested observant Jews in many ways. In the fifth century, a Jewish captain, obeying the prohibition against work on the Sabbath, refused to take the helm on the day of rest. Even when one of the soldiers on board threatened to behead him, the captain ignored the drawn sword and continued to pray. Only when a storm threatened to wreck the vessel, did the pious Jew resume his command, observing the higher law of saving the lives on board; Augustine Fitzgerald (ed. and trans.), The Letters of Synesius of Cyrene (London, 1926), p. 81-85.
- 35 Kasovich, p. 179.
- 36 Sen. Doc. 753 (serial 5877): pp. 14-15, 24.
- 37 Zweiter Jahresbericht des Zentralbureaus fur Judische Auswanderungsangelegenheiten, 1906 (Berlin, 1907), p. 18; American Jewish Historical Society, Waltham, Massachusetts. Alexander Harkavy Papers, Diary of a Visit to Europe in the Interests of Jewish Emigration, 1906, transcribed by Marc Lee Raphael, p. 1; AJA, Box 2538, Henry Cohen collection, letter, 5 Nov. 1907 from Israel Zangwill.
- 38 AJA, The Deutsch Catalogue, reference to Der treue Zions Wacher, vol. 8 (1852) p. 12; Kasovich, p. 172; Chotzinoff, pp. 40, 57-58.
- 39 Sen. Doc. 753 (serial 5877): p. 36; Sec. 5, 22 Stat. 186 (1882); U.S., 50th Cong., 1st sess., 1886. Sen. Misc. Doc. 57 (serial 2516): Memorial of the American Medical Association praying for legislation to protect the lives of emigrants at sea.
- 40 Sen. Doc. 753 (serial 5877): pp. 9, 19-20, 38; Steiner, On the Trail, pp. 37-38; Antin, From Plotzk, p. 66.
- 41 Brandenburg, pp. 34-35, 190; Sen. Exec. Doc. 753 (serial 5877): p. 26; Bogen, pp. 33-34; NA, RG 85, 51411/1, p. 112; ARCGI for Fiscal 1903-04, p. 135.

- 42 Brandenburg, pp. 188-89, 204, 208-14; Sen. Doc. 753 (serial 5877): p. 38; Sen. Exec. Doc. 23 (serial 1580): p. 146; NA, RG 85, 51411/1, p. 133.
- Emigrants, denied permission to immigrate to America, were often grossly maltreated on their return voyages; Zosa Szajkowski, "Deportations of Jewish Immigrants and Returnees before World War I," American Jewish Historical Quarterly 67 (1978), pp. 291-306.
- In 1906, the crew on the S. S. Pennsylvania did not consider the "inferior beings" in steerage when they "shot, bled, skinned, and cut-up" several horses, carried as fodder for the tigers on board, in full view of the steerage dining room; NA, RG 85, 51411/2, Letter from Philip Cowen, 20 Sept. 1906.
- 43 H. Rep. 3472 (serial 2886): p. 442; Abraham Cahan, The Education of Abraham Cahan trans. Leon Stein et al. (Philadelphia, 1969), pp. 213-17; Antin, From Plotzk, p. 69; NA, RG 85, 51411/1, pp. 114-18.
- 44 Brandenburg, p. 142. Only steerage passengers in no danger of being turned back at the portals of America dared to match blows with the crew; Brandenburg, pp. 188-90.
- 45 Rose Cohen's Aunt Masha was repeatedly harassed as she journeyed from Mintck to the port of Hamburg; Out of the Shadow (New York, 1918), pp. 54-59. Not long after she had sailed by herself to America, fourteen year old Polly Adler was raped; pp. 24-25.
- 46 Sen. Doc. 753 (serial 5877): pp. 21-23; NA, RG 41, 39232-N, Part I, Letter to Surveyor of the Port of New York, 19 Sept. 1905; Part 2, Letter to E.T. Chamberlain, 13 Sept. 1905; NA, RG 85, 51411/1, pp. 121-23, 127-28; Sec. 2, 22 Stat. 186 (1882).
- 47 Susan Brownmiller, Against Our Will: Men, Women, and Rape (New York, 1975), pp. 256-57.
- 48 The reports of the steamship inspectors at Boston, New York, and Philadelphia for the fall of 1906 deemed the conduct of most ships' employees satisfactory; NA, RG 85, 51411/1,

- pp. 112-36; Sen. Exec. Doc. 23 (serial 1580): p. 196; Sen. Doc. 753 (serial 5877): pp. 21, 38.
- 49 Sec. 7, 22 Stat. 186 (1882). This law required the posting of this section of the statute "in the principal languages of the passengers on board." But on North German Lloyd ships the law appeared only in English and German translations which did most steerage passengers little good; Sen. Exec. Doc. 753 (serial 5877): pp. 10, 21.
- Sen. Exec. Doc. 23 (serial 1580): pp. 25-26; Sen. Doc. 753 (serial 5877): pp. 21-23, 38; NA, RG 85, 51411/1, p. 130; NA, RG 41, 43523-N, Part 6, Report of J.C. Voorhes, 13 Aug. 1908; Brandenburg, pp. 135, 198-99.
- 50 Sen. Doc. 753 (serial 5877): pp. 21-23.
- 51 Sen. Doc. 753 (serial 5877): pp. 22, 34; ARCGI for Fiscal 1913-14, p. 382.
- 52 Steiner, On the Trail, pp. 42-43, 58; Steiner, From Alien, pp. 39-41; Kasovich, p. 173; Cahan, p. 213; Benjamin L. Gordon, Between Two Worlds: The Memoirs of a Physician (New York, 1952), pp. 135-36. In the novel The Rise of David Levinsky, Abraham Cahan described the twenty-five year reunion of two "ship brothers;" (1912; rpt. New York, 1966), pp. 87-92, 513-16.
- 53 Melech Epstein, Pages from a Colorful Life (Detroit, 1971), pp. 48-49; Bernard Horwich, My First Eighty Years (Chicago, 1939), pp. 111-12; Benjamin M. Laikin, Memoirs of a Practical Dreamer Trans. Murray Kass & Moshe Starkman (New York, 1971), p. 91.
- 54 In 1891, Harold Frederic observed that the Hamburg committee sent a shomer to look after the welfare of the Jews on board; The New Exodus: A Study of Israel in Russia (New York, 1892), p. 276. In 1908, on one of Anna Herkner's cross-Atlantic trips, this time from England, the Hebrew guardian on board claimed he was "a pioneer in this work" Sen. Doc. 753 (serial 5877): pp. 26-27. AJA, Box 2538, Henry Cohen Collection, Letter from Jacob Schiff, 27 Oct. 1913.
- 55 Just when new steerage appeared is unclear. The article, "Dinner in the Steerage of a Transatlantic Steamer,"

described a meal served aboard a vessel of the Compagnie Générale Transatlantique that sounded remarkably like new steerage dining in 1890; Harper's Weekly, 22 Nov. 1890, p. 920. In 1891, William Smith traveled on the White Star Liner Majestic which provided family-size cabins and a smoking room for the steerage; pp. 1-15. Philip Taylor, whose study of European emigration is based in part on an examination of British steamship plans, concluded, "If [Smith] observed correctly, this was the beginning of a genuine Third class . . ." The Distant Magnet: European Emigration to U.S.A. (New York, 1971), pp. 145-66, p. 156.

- 56 Sen. Doc. 753 (serial 5877): pp. 10-12, 24-26; Graham, pp. 11-12.
- 57 Sen. Doc. 753 (serial 5877): pp. 10-12, 24-26.
- 58 Taylor, pp. 161-62, 164; See, for example the plan of the Cunard Caronia, NA, RG 41, 43523-N, Part 4A; On German vessels, see NA, RG 41, 52326-N. Even in 1914, articles on the advent of new steerage were still considered newsworthy; Francis Byrne Hackett, "The New Steerage," The Forum 52 (Oct. 1914), pp. 531-42. Old steerage did not become obsolete until after World War I; "The Passing of the Steerage," The Literary Digest 72 (21 Jan. 1922), p. 20.
- 59 While Taylor described new steerage accommodations, he did not explore the factors that led to this significant change in passenger transport; pp. 156-61. On the economic motivations behind new steerage, see Sen. Doc. 753 (serial 5877): p. 10. On the fares from England, see supra., pp. 149-50.
- In 1908, Anna Herkner's agent in Prague had tried to sell her a third class ticket on a Lloyd ship by describing old steerage as a place where "practically none but Russian and Polish Jews of the filthiest habits traveled;" Sen. Doc. 753 (serial 5877): p. 32; NA, RG 59, 5243, Report of Hamburg Consul, 20 March 1907.
- 60 Taylor, pp. 161-62; H. Exec. Doc. 235, Part I (serial 2957): p. 257; Sen. Exec. Doc. 23 (serial 1580): pp. 121, 141-49, 158; Steiner, On the Trail, p. 41; Steiner, From Alien, p. 38; Brandenburg, p. 176; Allon Schoener (ed.), Portals to America; The Lower East Side, 1870-1925 (New York, 1967), pp. 25-28.
- 61 Sen. Doc. 753 (serial 5877): p. 23

Conclusion

With mixed emotions of excitement and trepidation the East European Jews set off for America. Putting aside for the moment the hopes and dreams for the future in the goldene medinah, the emigrants turned to the urgent business of the impending journey. To reach America, all emigrants had to purchase tickets, pack belongings, bid farewells, travel to a seaport, and sail from there across the Atlantic. But for the East European Jews the additional obstacles of illegal emigration and embarkation from foreign ports complicated these already intricate arrangements and added to the disquiet of these travelers as they embarked upon this journey to America by steam.

The lengthy voyage from their homes in Russia, Austria, or Hungary to the shores of America exposed the East European Jews to four sets of novel experiences. The illegal emigration of most East European Jews precluded embarkation at native ports. Instead, these emigrants had to travel from their homes to the frontier where they stole over the border into Germany or Austria. Next, the East European Jews had to cross one or more foreign nations en route to the seaports. In these countries, the most important of which was Germany, the emigrants found themselves subject to regulations designed to restrain their freedom of movement and to make certain that they reached their destinations. In the port cities

the travelers bided their time waiting for the departure of their ships. After this last delay the East European Jews boarded the steamships whose steerages carried them along with all other emigrants to America.¹

In order to study the migration of the East European Jews, it was necessary first to examine the immigration and passenger transport laws of the United States. The American government had a vested interest in the physical condition of the immigrants who landed on its shores. In legislation regulating the carriage of all passengers bound for American ports, the Congress attempted in 1882, and again in 1908, to set minimum standards necessary to protect the health and safety of all those traveling to America by sea. In addition to this passenger legislation, immigration legislation designed to weed out those classes of immigrants considered unfit for residence in the United States affected all emigrants. After 1893, the steamship companies had to guarantee that every emigrant had passed a medical examination to qualify for immigration to America. Against the backdrop of this regulatory American legislation all emigrants, including the East European Jews, journeyed to America.

The Jewish emigrants, who had never traveled more than a few kilometers beyond the confines of their villages, had to overcome numerous stumbling blocks in preparing for the journey. Procuring steamship tickets, railroad tickets, and passports; baking provisions; deciding what luggage to carry; and figuring out how to

reach the frontier and safely cross it -- all confronted the emigrants in this first stage of their journey from shtetl to border. Not surprisingly, assisting the emigrants with these arrangements became a thriving business. In Russia, Austria, and Hungary, the East European Jews' demand to emigrate led to the emergence of a network of agents. Although emigration from Russia remained illegal, the Russian government turned a blind eye to the hundreds of thousands of Jews fleeing the motherland. In Russia agents, who were generally sub-agents of the major steamship companies, played crucial roles in arranging trans-Atlantic passages, securing passports, and helping these emigrants to steal over the border. The illegal nature of this business made it dangerous for the Russian Jews, many of whom paid the price of dealing with disreputable agents. While emigration from Austria and Hungary remained legal, Jewish travelers often found that agents in these countries acted in collusion with government officials to increase their profits at the expense of the unprotected travelers.

The proximity of Germany to the East European Jewish communities, its sizeable commercial fleets, and the assumption that German Jewry would aid their East European brethren in transit combined to influence most East European Jews to travel via Germany en route to America. Although Jewish emigration played an important role in the growth of German shipping, the German authorities were concerned that the unrestricted transmigration of the East European Jews would prove detrimental to the Reich. These officials feared

that impoverished East European Jews would burden the public relief agencies, spread infectious diseases, or even opt to settle in Germany. These concerns, coupled with the necessity of meeting the requirements of the U.S. immigration legislation, led Germany to develop a system of control of all emigrants-in-transit. This elaborate plan was designed to segregate and isolate the transmigrants from the moment they entered the Reich until they exited aboard a Hamburg-American or North German Lloyd steamship. Ultimately, this network involved fourteen border control stations, the segregation of all emigrants in special trains, and their continued isolation in special facilities at the German seaports.

German Jewry assisted its co-religionists in transit through the Reich. An initial tendency on the part of German Jewish philanthropies to aid only those deemed fit for immigration gave way in face of the massive migration. Various German Jewish organizations provided food, shelter, clothing, medical, and legal assistance to all East European Jews in transit. These associations also successfully lobbied for the provision of kosher food and the accommodations to Jewish ritual needs that appeared in some of the emigrant reception stations and on board some German steamships.

The goal of the East European Jews in this second stage of their voyage was to reach a seaport. For Russian Jews Libau was the closest port for embarkation. But the relatively few Jews who possessed passports often avoided this Russian harbor with its reputation for wretched accommodations and indirect service to

America. With the ports of Hamburg, Bremen, Rotterdam, Antwerp, and Liverpool all competing for the emigrant traffic, East European Jews gravitated towards the German and British harbors. Embarkation via Hamburg and Bremen proved the shortest route since most East European Jews were already in transit through Germany. But many Jews traveled a more circuitous path, sailing first to England and then crossing the Atlantic from there. Aid proffered by British Jewry enticed some Jewish transmigrants to England. But the promise of cheaper fares to America from Liverpool than those available on the continent enticed more.

In all seaports the emigrants lodged at special boarding houses. Those that accommodated Jewish passengers supplied kosher food and were sometimes affiliated with Jewish philanthropies. As a result of the German demand to isolate the emigrants-in-transit, a separate cluster of emigrant quarters ultimately supplanted this system of individual boarding houses. The first of these, the Hamburg-American Auswandererhallen, was built on the outskirts of Hamburg in 1891. Over the next fifteen years the Auswandererhallen grew into a small city capable of accommodating several thousand travelers at a time. In the first decade of the twentieth century the North German Lloyd Line at Bremen and the Cunard Line at Liverpool built facilities modeled on this Hamburg plan.

Their journey within the perimeters of Europe at an end, the East European Jews embarked on the final phase of the voyage to America, the crossing in steamship steerage. Having passed the

medical examination that enabled them to proceed, they, along with all other emigrants, descended into the steerage holds. For the next ten days to two weeks, the travelers endured the noise, the tumult, the confusion, the stench, and the overcrowding that the cramming of hundreds or a thousand or more emigrants into a confined space produced. For the Jewish travelers concerns about kashrut and tensions with other emigrant groups and the crew added to the difficulties of this voyage. While some travelers enjoyed the comforts of a crossing in new steerage, the majority of the East European Jews suffered the hardships of this journey to America in old steerage.

In his classic study of European emigration The Uprooted, Oscar Handlin wrote of the emigrants during the crossing:

Thus uprooted, they found themselves in a prolonged state of crisis -- crisis in the sense that they were, and remained unsettled. For weeks, and often for months, they were in suspense between the old and the new, literally in transit. Every adjustment was temporary and therefore in its nature bore the seeds of maladjustment, for the conditions to which the immigrants were adjusting were strange and ever changing.²

The impact of the journey upon the East European Jews in transit supports Handlin's evaluation of the prolonged state of crisis engendered by the voyage. Emigration was a turning point in the history of East European Jewry, and Jewish emigrants seem to have sensed the significance of the changes underway. While emigration fever disrupted the traditional patterns of life in these communities, its impact upon the individual emigrants was

nothing less than traumatic. For those that had made the decision to emigrate, the anticipation of separation from loved ones, friends, and familiar surrounding colored those final days at home. Separation produced intense emotional stress akin to bereavement. Only both those who departed and those left behind mourned:

My grandfather was a man of few words, and when he began to speak about our departure the words choked in his throat, emerging as a groan. Each time he left, he would repeat the same brief, mournful formula -- as though he were counting the days between Passover and the Feast of Weeks. "So today is the nth day before your departure!" As he went out to the street, he would begin sounding his clapper. "Clap-clap-one daughter lost, another daughter lost, a third daughter, and the only son of his dead elder daughter leaving! Clap-clap-Too much for me to bear! Clap-clap-Out of my distress I cry to God . . ."3

During the early part of the evening mother and I walked up and down in the front yard, my hand in hers, talking of the past and the future, and carefully avoiding any reference to the present . . . She seemed calm and resigned. But when the train drew into the station, she lost control of her feelings. As she embraced me for the last time her sobs became violent and father had to separate us. There was despair in her way of clinging to me which I could not then understand. I understand it now. I never saw her again.⁴

In a state of shock from this trauma of separation the East European Jews embarked on their journey. They left behind the protective confines of a tightly knit community that had traditionally cared for its own and entrusted their well-being to strangers. At any stage in their journey ticket agents, smugglers, border guards, policemen, railroad conductors,

physicians, or ships' officers could wreak havoc in the lives of these emigrants. Their safe arrival in America depended upon these officials. But a false ticket, a wrong turn at the frontier, a demand for bribes not met, or a pronouncement of ill-health could strand the emigrants in the midst of their journey in a strange country. Anxiety about the obstacles of the voyage weighed upon the emigrants. Sometimes, however, that anxiety became fear that the journey begun would end in disaster.

A German physician and several gendarmes boarded the train and put us through a searching examination as to our health, destination, and financial resources. As a result of the inquisition we were informed that we would not be allowed to cross the frontier unless we exchanged our third-class steamer ticket for second-class, which would require two hundred rubles more than we possessed. Our passport was taken from us, and we were to be turned back on our journey . . . With strong hopes and high spirits that hid the sad parting, we had started on our long journey. And now we were checked so unexpectedly but surely, the blow coming from where we little expected it, being, as we believed, safe in that quarter. When my mother had recovered enough to speak, she began to argue with the gendarme, telling him our story and begging him to be kind. The children were frightened and all but I cried. ⁵I was only wondering what would happen.

Uncertain about the successful outcome of their journey, the East European Jews also experienced a distress of a different nature. As they left their homelands, they joined the throngs of emigrants heading for America. In Germany, at the seaports, and on board the steamships the East European Jews became part of the

nameless mass of emigrants. Pushed and pulled from different directions, they found all individual identity obliterated. To the German officials who drove them to the seaports, to the matrons who bathed them in the reception stations, and to the officers who bullied them about the ships, the emigrants were a commodity to be handled and dispatched. Lost amid the hordes of travelers, alone among the thousands of strangers, the East European Jews found themselves deprived of all personal dignity. In the midst of his journey one Russian Jew stepped back for a moment and recorded in his diary this image of the mass migration:

When one observes it from close range, one cannot grasp the situation. He is stunned by the multitude and the noise and shouts of the tens of thousands of people. When one sees the picture from a distance, it looks as if the walls are plastered with ants moving one on top of another.⁶

The migration uprooted the East European Jews from their families and familiar surroundings and plopped them down in a new world run by agents, gendarmes, and ships' officers. Contending with each new experience of the journey produced great emotional and physical stress. Adding to that stress, the trauma of separation, the anxieties about the journey, and the feelings of loss of individual identity pushed the East European Jewish emigrants over the brink of crisis. Handlin has suggested that all emigrants-in-transit to America were in crisis. Perhaps this work on the migration arrangements made by one group and the impact of the journey upon these emigrants-in-transit can serve as a model

for similar studies of other peoples who made the same voyage to America.

To Mary Antin, one of the most vivid chroniclers of this journey, belong the final words. In From Plotzk to Boston she captured the ordeal of this voyage.

Now imagine yourself parting with all you love, believing it to be a parting for life; breaking up your home, selling the things that years have made dear to you; starting on a journey without the least experience in traveling, in the face of many inconveniences on account of the want of sufficient money; being met with disappointment where it was not to be expected, with rough treatment everywhere, till you are forced to go and make friends for yourself among strangers; being obliged to sell some of your most necessary things to pay bills you did not willingly incur; being mistrusted and searched, then half starved, and lodged in common with a multitude of strangers; suffering the miseries of seasickness, the disturbances and alarm of a stormy sea for sixteen days . . .⁷

Imagine all this and one can begin to fathom the East European Jews' journey to America by steam.

Notes

- 1 Compare Oscar Handlin's classic study of European migration, The Uprooted (Boston, 1951), pp. 37-62. Handlin's first three stages in "The Crossing" to America were the journey "on land in Europe, in the port of embarkation, (and) on the ocean . . ."
- 2 Handlin, p. 62.
- 3 Ephraim E. Lisitsky, In the Grip of Cross-Currents trans. Moshe Kohn and Jacob Sloan (New York, 1959), p. 58.
- 4 Marcus Eli Ravage, An American in the Making: The Life Story of an Immigrant (2nd ed., 1936; rpt. New York, 1971), pp. 54-55.
- 5 Mary Antin, The Promised Land (1912; rpt. Boston, 1969), pp. 170-71.
- 6 American Jewish Archives, Biographies File, Diary of George Moses Price, 1882, p. 12.
- 7 Mary Antin, From Plotzk to Boston (1899; rpt. Upper Saddle River, New Jersey, 1970), p. 80.

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