

**NATIONAL MUSEUMS LIVERPOOL**  
**MARITIME ARCHIVES & LIBRARY**  
**INFORMATION SHEET 13**  
**EMIGRATION TO USA AND CANADA**

Emigration to the Americas began as early as 1585, but the first successful settlement was not established until Jamestown in 1607, with perhaps the most famous subsequent arrivals being that of the *Mayflower* from Plymouth in 1620 carrying a party of Puritans. Emigrants also went to work on the tobacco plantations in Virginia, many as indentured servants of the plantation owners. The Americas were also Britain's first penal colony, with many thousands of men, women and children from England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland sentenced to transportation in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. Although the sentences were usually only for 7 or 14 years, many would never be able to return home.

Transportation to America ended with the American War of Independence in 1776, but emigration to America and Canada continued throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Canada became the main British colony for transportation and emigration, particularly child migration with some 80,000 child emigrants from the UK between 1870 and 1914 (see Information Sheet 10, Child Migration).

Between 1830 and 1930 over nine million emigrants sailed from Liverpool bound for a new life in the "New World" countries such as the United States, Canada and Australia. For much of this period Liverpool was the most popular port of departure for emigrants from Europe to the Americas and Canada because she already had well established transatlantic links based on the import of cotton and timber. Liverpool was also well placed to receive the many emigrants from the countries of north western Europe, who would cross the North Sea to Hull and then travel to Liverpool by train. Liverpool's share of the emigrant trade began to decline from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century as emigrants increasingly came from the countries of southern and eastern Europe, and although some passed through Liverpool, most sailed from the nearer German and Italian ports. In addition, in the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Southampton became the main departure port for Cunard liners and other ships sailing to America.

There were three main motives for emigration. Some of the emigrants were fleeing from the hardships of poverty and unemployment, for example, the 1,250,000 Irish who emigrated between 1845 and 1851 as a result of the potato famine. For Russian and Polish Jews, emigration was a way of escaping from political and religious persecution. Other emigrants were not suffering the hardships of poverty or the terror of persecution, but were attracted by the possibility of a higher standard of living in the United States, Canada and elsewhere in the "New World". The "Gold Rush" in America and Australia also encouraged people to emigrate to make their fortunes.

Emigrants could often spend from one to ten days or more, waiting for their ship in a Liverpool lodging house. In the late 1840s and 1850s, lodging houses were often inhospitable, dirty and overcrowded. In the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century emigrants passing through Liverpool were also subject to harassment and fraud by local confidence tricksters, known as 'runners', who would frequently snatch emigrants' luggage and would only return it upon payment of a large fee.

From the 1860s the situation began to improve as steam started to replace sail on the Atlantic route. The steamship companies started to look after the emigrants during their stay in Liverpool with their representatives meeting them upon arrival in Liverpool, and taking them to lodging houses which were often owned by the steamship companies.

Until the early 1860s most emigrants left Liverpool on a sailing ship. The voyage to the United States and Canada took about thirty five days. Most emigrants travelled in the cheapest class of accommodation, known as the steerage. This was similar to a dormitory with bunks down the sides and tables in the centre. It was frequently overcrowded with poor ventilation. Emigrating in a sailing ship could be unpleasant, particularly during a storm. Seasickness was a particular problem on the stormy North Atlantic westbound voyage, and diseases such as cholera and typhus frequently reached epidemic proportion as infection spread throughout the confined decks. Scores of emigrants died from these diseases. Conditions improved following the 1855 Passenger Act which laid down minimum standards for rations, space and sanitation.

By 1870 virtually all emigrants to the United States and Canada went by steamship and the voyage was consequently reduced to between seven and ten days. Competition between the steamship companies helped, to some extent, to improve conditions for the emigrants, and from about 1900, third-class cabins began to replace the steerage accommodation.

Emigrants made a variety of new lives for themselves in the United States and Canada, finding work on farms, in industry and building railways. Some fared no better or even worse than at home, and often returned home if they could afford to do so.

## **Records**

Official lists of passengers arriving in USA and Canada, are to be found in the appropriate national archives. No official lists of passengers exist in any local repositories in the UK (see Information Sheet 31, *Passengers on Board Ship*). The National Archives (PRO), Ruskin Avenue, Kew, Richmond, Surrey, TW9 4DU, holds Board of Trade passenger lists of vessels travelling inwards to and outwards from British ports, including Liverpool, from the 1890s to 1960 (BT 26, 27 and 32). The outward list BT 27 is now available online at [www.findmypast.com](http://www.findmypast.com). Inward passenger lists from 1878 to 1960 are also available online at [www.ancestry.co.uk/search/db.aspx?dbid=1518](http://www.ancestry.co.uk/search/db.aspx?dbid=1518).

Some passenger lists for Cunard Line from 1840-1853 survive in the Liverpool University Cunard Archives, but these do not cover emigrant steerage passengers until 1860.

The Maritime Archives & Library has a significant collection of emigrant diaries, letters, photographs and examples of passage tickets and guides in its DX/SAS collections.

No permission, passport or application form was necessary, in order to emigrate from Great Britain or Ireland in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Only when financial assistance, from or via the government, was required, did forms of application have to be completed. There were many assisted emigrants to Australia and New Zealand in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, also to Canada, especially in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. There were a number of private emigration schemes to USA, but none had government backing since they did not contribute to British interests in what later became the Empire, and later still, the Commonwealth. Records of these schemes do not seem to have survived in the National Archives.

There are no records of the shipping company hostels or boarding houses. If people stayed over a census night they might be recorded but one would need to know the address of the hostel first.

**Shipping Companies who sailed to USA and Canada for which the Maritime Archives & Library holds archive material**

## Allan Line

The Montreal Ocean Steamship Co. (popularly known as the Allan Line) was founded by Hugh Allan in 1854, to provide a regular steamship service from Liverpool to Canada, and attracted substantial emigrant traffic by direct sailings from Glasgow with calls at Irish ports. Competition from the International Mercantile Marine from 1902 and Canadian Pacific Railway Co. from 1903 led to the amalgamation with Canadian Pacific in 1915.

### **Records**

Publicity Brochure, 1900.

Notebook of ships and voyages, 1892 - 1893.

Sailing Posters, 1886 - 1911.

Passenger List, 1913.

Miscellaneous wreck papers, 1863.

Minute Books, Nomination Books, Annual Reports, etc., for the Montreal O.S.S. Co.

Mutual Benefit Society, c.1863 - 1966.

SAS/23D/1-3 & DX various c.1863 - 1966 1 Box

## Anchor Line

The Anchor Line was founded by Thomas Henderson to provide a Glasgow-New York steamer service. From 1866 its weekly service called at Moville for Irish emigrants. In 1869 Scandinavian emigrants began to be carried on a feeder service to Leith and onwards by rail to Glasgow. In 1871 it developed a Mediterranean-US service and in 1882 it took over the liner, *City of Rome*, which had been handed back to its builders by the Inman Line, which it used to start a Liverpool-New York service. The company was purchased by Cunard in 1911.

### **Records**

Ship's Newspaper, *City of Rome Express* (Liverpool-New York), 1890, SAS/29/2/3

Headed Notepaper (2 unused sheets) SAS/33E/1/1

Poster: Liverpool-New York colour illustration of ship *Furnessia*, steerage fare and plan of salon and cabin, 1892, DX/1169

## Cunard Line

The Cunard Line began as the British and North American Royal Mail Steam Packet Company operating four wooden paddle steamers in 1840. In 1847 the service was increased to a weekly sailing across the Atlantic in each direction. In response to competition from lines such as Inman, National and White Star, it was reinvigorated as the Cunard Steam Ship Co., Ltd., and the fleet modernised in 1878. But by 1902 with the formation of the American combine, the International Mercantile Marine and German competition, it was under threat. In 1904 it took the bold step of building the steam turbine-powered 20,000-ton *Carmania*. Its success led to the building (with government assistance) of two 32,000-ton express liners, *Mauretania* and *Lusitania* (1907) which captured the Blue Riband.

After the First World War the fleet was rebuilt and included the ex-German liner *Berengaria* (formerly *Imperator*). The express service was moved from Liverpool to Southampton in 1919 and eventually two large liners, *Queen Mary* (1936) and *Queen Elizabeth* (1940) were built with government assistance. Both played vital roles as troopships in the Second World War. The White Star Line was acquired in 1934.

The line prospered after the war but passenger traffic declined in the 1960s, leading to a change from regular transatlantic services to cruising only, and to entry into the Atlantic

Container Lines consortium for cargo services in 1966. In 1971 it was taken over by Trafalgar House Investments Ltd., which continue to own cruise ships, including *Queen Elizabeth 2* and *Caronia*.

## **Records**

Ship plans and records from the naval architect's and marine engineer's offices and a rich collection of printed ephemera in the SAS and DX miscellaneous collections including menus, postcards and souvenir brochures. Cunard archives are held at Liverpool University Archives.

## **Dominion Line**

This company was formed in 1870 as the Liverpool and Mississippi Steamship Co. It expanded its services to include Quebec and Montreal in 1872, changing its name to the Mississippi and Dominion Steamship Co., abbreviated to Dominion Line. Emigrants to Canada comprised the bulk of its weekly service to Quebec and Montreal, calling at Irish ports en route. The company was bought by IMM in 1902 and from 1909 until 1926 the Canadian trade was maintained as a joint service with White Star.

## **Records**

Papers relating to Henry Eves of the SS *Ottoman*, for rescuing crew from the Dutch schooner *Anna*, including a letter from Dominion Lines, re the incident, SAS/23A/2/15  
Passenger list for RMS *Vancouver*, Montreal to Liverpool via Londonderry, 1899, DX/2055

## **Guion Line**

Stephen Guion, part-owner of the New York-Liverpool Old Black Star Line of sailing packets and manager of Cunard's emigrant business (1862-1866), set up his own steamship line, Liverpool and Great Western Steamship Co. or Guion Line, in 1866. Guion's death in 1885, poor traffic and the high cost of its big fast ships led to its winding up in 1894.

## **Records**

Guidebook, *Liverpool, London, Paris*, 1875, SAS/33F/3/3  
Ticket for passage to New York on *Arizona*, 1892, B/AW/22  
Poster, c.1890, DX/596  
Plan of the *Oregon*, 1882, Cunard collection

## **Inman Line**

Founded in 1850 by Richardson Brothers & Co., with William Inman as partner, the Inman Line was the first steamship line to carry steerage passengers. Despite the loss of two ships and 480 passengers and crew in 1854 and the suspension of transatlantic sailings in favour of war work, 1854-1856, the line prospered and expanded. From 1871 intense competition, especially from the White Star Line, and increased shipbuilding costs caused problems. In 1886 the line was sold to the American International Navigation Co., owners of the American and Red Star Lines. This eventually led to American ownership in 1892 and the shift of the British terminus to Southampton in 1893.

## **Records**

Financial Papers, etc., re the formation of Inman Steamship Co., Ltd., D/SO/7/1/40  
Poster advertising the company's services to emigrants, 1874, in the Bryson Collection, D/B/115GG  
The Alsop Wilkinson Marine Solicitors collection contains Financial Agreements, Deeds of Covenants, etc., between the Inman Steam Ship Co., Ltd. and Barrow Shipbuilding Co., re

repairs to the *City of Rome*, 1884-1887, and agreements as to agency between the Inman Steam Ship Co. and the International Navigation Co., Ltd., 1885, B/AW/29

### **National Line**

Founded in Liverpool in 1863, the National Steam Navigation Co., Ltd., concentrated on a fleet of large iron-screw steamers for the cargo and emigrant trade from Liverpool to New York. In 1867 it was reorganised to meet the challenge of the new Guion Line set up by its former passenger agent. The policy of capacity rather than speed was pursued, and in 1870 the line carried 33,500 steerage passengers and 395,000 tons of cargo, which put it ahead of Cunard, Guion and Anchor, and just behind Inman. However, the line stagnated in the late-1870s despite several attempts to establish new services and although the years 1887-1889 were reasonably profitable, there was a drop in traffic in 1890 and a loss of two ships in six months. The Liverpool passenger service was ended and replaced with a cargo-only London-New York service. The Line was bought by the Atlantic Transport Line in 1896 and operated separately until its disappearance in 1914.

### **Records**

Sailing Bills for the National Line's Liverpool-New York service, c.1870, SAS/33F/3/9.

Advertisements for sailing, c.1875-1880, SAS/33F/3/1.

Bryson Collection includes a Director's report and statement of accounts, 1872; resolution of the Board, re an agreement made between Atlantic trade competitors, 1875; and share transfer certificates and dividends, 1873-1875, D/B/115.

### **White Star Line**

Thomas Ismay, sailing shipowner and a director of the National Line, bought the name and goodwill of the defunct White Star Line of Australian sailing packets in 1867. In 1868, he set up the Ocean Steam Navigation Co., Ltd., which was known as the White Star Line. Sailings started in 1870 and were an immediate success. It strengthened its position by a traffic-sharing agreement with the Inman Line. Ismay, Imrie & Co., the managers, also ran a fleet of large iron and steel sailing ships until 1895. In 1888-1889 it began to buy cargo and cattle steamers as well as large luxurious passenger liners of moderate speed, a policy which ultimately led to the 45,000-ton sisters *Olympic*, *Titanic* and *Britannic*. Thomas Ismay died in 1899 and in 1902 his creation was sold to the International Mercantile Marine. Its British management and registry was retained; services with other British lines in the IMM, such as Dominion, were rationalised and the "main line" service was moved in 1907 from Liverpool to Southampton from where the ill-fated *Titanic* left on its maiden voyage in April 1912. In 1926 it was purchased by Lord Kylsant, whose subsequent crash caused the merger with Cunard in 1934. The motor ships *Britannic* (1930) and *Georgic* (1932) were retained on the Liverpool-New York service.

### **Records**

#### **Bryson Collection**

Monthly office accounts of J.B. Ismay, 1908 - 1912.

Correspondence, C. McIver, W.S. Graves, T.H. Ismay, re advance for Beaver Line, also F.M. Radcliffe (partner in Ayrton, Alderson Smith), 1894 - 1911.

Letters, re the disposal of papers of T.H. Ismay involving members of the family, 1910 - 1914.

Correspondence, Mrs. T.H. Ismay and Norman Shaw, architect, re memorial to T.H. Ismay, 1899 - 1900.

Provisional agreement with J.P. Morgan & Co., re the acquisition of White Star and four other lines, 1902, with correspondence and notice of Ordinary General Meeting, 1902.

File, re the estate of T.H. Ismay, 1907 - 1935.

Bills, re White Star offices, 1922 - 1923.

Company pension fund papers, 1938.

D/B/174

1863 - 1963

3 Boxes

Correspondence with P.A.S. Franklin, New York, re the resignation of J. Bruce Ismay from the Board of IMM, 1916.

Correspondence, J. Bruce Ismay to the Lord Mayor of Liverpool, re the extension of Liverpool Seamen's Pension Fund (founded by T.H. Ismay) to provide for seamen's widows, 1912.

Letter from Chief Engineer of *Olympic*, re maiden voyage , 1911, with other letters including one on the coal situation affecting the speed of *Olympic* and *Titanic*.

Correspondence, P.A.S. Franklin, J. Bruce Ismay, Captain E.J. Smith of the *Olympic*, etc., re *Olympic* to show that J. Bruce Ismay was opposed to fast running of steamers, 1911.

DX/504

1893 - 1917

1 Box

Plans of White Star liners can be found in the Cunard ship plan collection.

### **Bibliography**

MORTON, Allan. *Directory of European Passenger Steamship Arrivals*. Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing, 1987.

READ, G. & REES, P. *The Leaving of Liverpool*. Liverpool: National Museums Liverpool, 1986.

COLEMAN, T. *Passage to America*. London: Penguin, 1972.

ERICKSON, C. *Invisible Immigrants*. Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1972.

GUILLET, E.C. *The Great Migration, 1770-1860*. Toronto: University of Toronto, 1963.

JONES, M.A., *Destination America*. London: Thames T.V., 1976.

MADDOCKS, M. *The Atlantic Crossing*. Alexandria, USA: Time-Life, 1981.

TEPPER, M. *American Passenger Arrival Records*. Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Company, 1988.

THRELFALL, Helen. *Emigration - A Bibliography of Works in the English Language held by the Maritime Archives & Library*. Liverpool: National Museums Liverpool, 1996.

### **Useful Addresses**

#### **Canada - National & Provincial Archives**

**National Archives of Canada, 395 Wellington Street, Ottawa, Ontario, K1A 0N3 - [www.archives.ca](http://www.archives.ca)**

**Provincial Archives of Alberta**  
12845-102 Avenue  
Edmonton  
Alberta T5N 0M6

**Public Archives of Nova Scotia**  
6016 University Avenue  
Halifax  
Nova Scotia B3H 1W4

**Provincial Archives of British Columbia**

655 Belleville Street  
Victoria  
British Columbia V8V 1X4

**Provincial Archives of Manitoba**

220 Vaughan Street  
Winnipeg  
Manitoba R3C 0P8

**Provincial Archives of New Brunswick**

PO Box 6000  
Fredericton  
New Brunswick E3B 5H1

**Provincial Archives of Newfoundland and Labrador**

Colonial Building  
Military Road  
St. John's  
Newfoundland A1C 5T7

**Archives of the Northwest Territories**

Prince of Wales  
Northern Heritage Centre  
Yellowknife  
Northwest Territories X1A 2L9

**Archives of Ontario**

77 Grenville Street  
Queen's Park  
Toronto  
Ontario M7A 2R9

**Public Archives of Prince Edward Island**

PO Box 7000  
Charlottetown  
Prince Edward Island C1A 7M4

**Archives Nationales de Quebec**

PO Box 10450  
Sainte-Foy  
Quebec G1V 4N1

**Saskatchewan Archives Board**

Regina Office  
University of Regina  
Regina  
Saskatchewan S4S 0A2

**Yukon Territory Archives**

PO Box 2703  
Whitehorse  
Yukon Territory Y1A 2C6

**USA National Archives Regional System****National Archives & Records Service (NARS) General Services Administration, Pennsylvania Avenue, Washington, DC 20408**

[www.archives.gov](http://www.archives.gov)

**National Archives - New England Region**

380 Trapelo Road  
Waltham, MA 02154  
Tel: 617 647 8100  
(Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, Vermont)

**National Archives - Pittsfield Region**

100 Dan Fox Drive  
Pittsfield, MA 01201  
Tel: 413 445 6885  
(Microfilm only)

**National Archives - North East Region**

201 Varick Street  
New York, NY 10014  
Tel: 212 337 1300  
(New Jersey, New York, Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands)

**National Archives - South West Region**

PO Box 6216  
501 West Felix Street  
Forth Worth, TX 76115  
Tel: 817 334 5525  
(Arkansas, Louisiana, New Mexico\*, Oklahoma, Texas)  
(\*Most records from Federal Agencies in New Mexico are at the Rocky Mountain Range)

**National Archives - Rocky Mountain Region**

Building 48, Denver Federal Center  
Denver, CO 80225-0307  
Tel: 303 236 0817  
(Colorado, Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota, Utah, Wyoming, New Mexico  
(see \* above)

**National Archives - Pacific South West Region**

24000 Avila Road  
Laguna Niguel, CA 92656  
Tel: 714 643 4241  
(Arizona, Southern California and Clark County, Nevada)

**National Archives - Mid-Atlantic Region**

9<sup>th</sup> and Market Streets, Room 1350  
Philadelphia, PA 19107  
Tel: 215 597 3000  
(Delaware, Maryland, Pennsylvania, Virginia,  
West Virginia)

**National Archives - South East Region**

1557 St. Joseph Avenue  
East Point, GA 30344  
Tel: 404 763 7477  
(Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky,  
Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina,  
Tennessee)

**National Archives - Great Lakes Region**

7358 South Pulaski Road  
Chicago, IL 60629  
Tel: 312 581 7816  
(Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio,  
Wisconsin)

**National Archives - Central Plains Region**

2312 East Bannister Road  
Kansas City, MO 64131  
Tel: 816 926 6272  
(Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska)

**National Archives - Pacific Sierra Region**

1000 Commodore Drive  
San Bruno, CA 94066  
Tel: 415 876 9009  
(Northern California, Hawaii, Nevada (except  
Clark County), the Pacific Trust Territories,  
American Samoa)

**National Archives - Pacific North West Region**

6125 Sand Point Way NE  
Seattle, WA 98115  
Tel: 206 526 6507  
(Idaho, Oregon, Washington)

**National Archives - Alaska Region**

654 West Third Avenue  
Anchorage, AK 99501  
Tel: 907 271 2441  
(Alaska)

The Immigrant Transcribers Guild (USA) have recently transcribed a number of British ships' passenger lists. These include over 1,700 for ships departing from Liverpool, 1772-1929, held at the National Archives Records Administration, Washington D.C.

Visit their website at: [www.immigrantships.net/](http://www.immigrantships.net/)

Online searchable databases of names of people who passed through Castle Garden and Ellis Island, can be found at: [www.castlegarden.org](http://www.castlegarden.org) and [www.ellislandrecords.org](http://www.ellislandrecords.org)

Information on passenger lists, fleet lists and ship arrivals, can be found at:

[www.theshiplist.com](http://www.theshiplist.com)

The Irish Emigration Database, a computerised collection of primary source documents, including passenger lists, emigrant's letters and diaries, etc., on Irish emigration to the USA and Canada in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, is being compiled by the Centre for Migration Studies at the Ulster American Folk Park, details of which can be found at:

[www.qub.ac.uk/cms](http://www.qub.ac.uk/cms)