



Ellis Island and BallinStadt: linking past and present

In times when speed dominates our lives, more and more people are rediscovering their families as the centre of calm in a hectic world. Where do I come from? Where am I going? Questions that have interested mankind for centuries.

Genealogy has never been as popular as it is today. Hordes of amateur genealogists populate the archives assiduously searching for every possible piece of information about their long-lost relatives – people who, in days long past, set out in search of a new future, in a new place, in a new country.

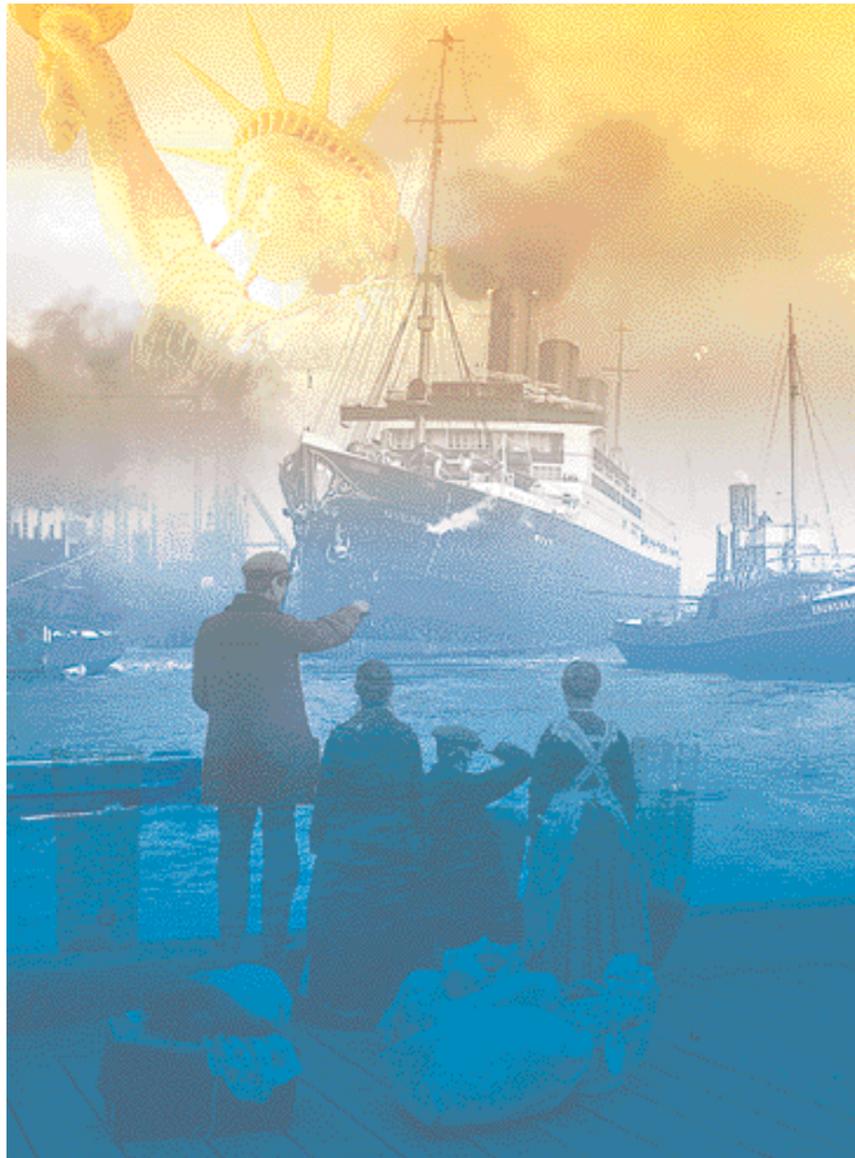
Emigration and immigration centres, such as Ellis Island or BallinStadt in the Port of Hamburg, have recognized this desire and are helping people in their search. Ellis Island leads the way here. Since 1990, the museum has offered its visitors professional assistance in their search for European ancestors.

Its European counterpart, the BallinStadt Emigrants World, opened on historical soil in Germany in July 2007. Three of the thirty buildings are faithful reconstructions of the original. Thousands of people came to the dormitories every week and waited here for weeks until their ship set sail. The new BallinStadt focuses on the stories of five million emigrants – their hopes, their dreams, their wishes.

Albert Ballin, Director General of HAPAG, built the shelters which were taken into service in 1901. They make up a small town with hotels, restaurants, a hospital and churches, in addition to the pavilions for living and sleeping.

After crossing the Atlantic, the emigrants must pass through the Ellis Island immigration station where they have to answer countless questions before they can start out on their new life in America. More than twelve million people entered the country through Ellis Island between 1892 and 1954.

Little Germany at the southern tip of Manhattan was the first stop for many of the German immigrants in their new country. The new enclave grew up full of hope in the 1830s. The first emigration wave brought thousands of German immigrants with capital and skills to New York. They set up business as tailors, carpenters, shoemakers or bakers. Before long, New York was the most German town in America with such typically German rituals as the „Schuetzenfest“ or „Schuetzen-Bund-Parade“.



The parents of Henry J. Heinz and Henry E. Steinway were among the very first immigrants from Germany. Both families seized their chance and made their dreams come true.

After nearly a hundred years of turbulent history, however, Little Germany came to an abrupt end in 1904: the community declined following the disaster of the „General Slocum“, a side-wheel steamship which was devoured by fire on 15 June 1904, killing more than 1,300 passengers from the German neighbourhood.

More and more Americans of German origin took shelter in anonymity following the two World Wars; many ang-

licized their German names. It is only now that they are rediscovering their roots and setting out in search of their ancestors on both sides of the Atlantic.

The Hamburg passenger lists from 1850 to 1934 are a particular highlight of the BallinStadt exhibition. The State Archives in Hamburg first began to digitize the passenger lists several years ago; since the beginning of this year, they can be accessed in the Internet at www.ancestry.de. As in their American counterpart, trained staff at the BallinStadt exhibition help people to trace their ancestry and link the past with the present.

Corinna Meiß ■



DIE BALLINSTADT
FÜR AMERIKANER

FOTO: BEATE ZOELLNER

The BallinStadt souvenir-shop