Oldest Consulate in Germany

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KNOW YE THAT reposing special trust and confidence in the abilities and integrity of Arnold Delius of Bremen, I have nominated and appoint him Consul of the United States of America at the Port of Bremen," wrote President George Washington on May 29, 1794, at Philadelphia.

Thus did the first President of the new American Republic, in the eighteenth year of its independence, create consular representation at Bremen, Free Hanseatic City of Northwestern Germany, at the time one of the dozens of political units of the tottering Holy Roman Empire.

The American Consular Service at that time was as uncertain of its existence as was that hodge-podge of many different states stretching from the North Sea nearly to the lower Danube, but for a different reason. The American Consular Service was established under laws passed by Congress in 1790 and 1792 but it was not reduced to a regular service until a basic law was passed for the service in 1856.

Nevertheless, President Washington felt it proper to "enjoin all Captains, Masters and Commanders of ships and other vessels, armed or unarmed, sailing under the Flag of the said States as well as all other of their Citizens, to acknowledge him, the said Arnold Delius, accordingly." All powers and authorities in and superior to Bremen were requested to permit Delius "peaceably to perform the duties of his office and to afford him all proper countenance and assistance; I offering to do the same for all those who shall in like manner be recommended to me by the said Powers and Authorities."

BREMEN IS THUS one of the oldest consular offices, having been established almost as long as we have existed as a nation. This consular relation has continued, with only the two tragic interruptions of two world wars, down to the present day.

The American Consulate General at 20 Contrescarpe, Bremen, shown above as it looks today, was established by charter signed by President Washington May 29, 1794.

There are many reasons why there should have been this representation of the American Government there. People of Bremen like to think that the key which appears on the shield of their city means "Key to the World," but to many American business houses it meant the key to Germany.

As the years from 1794 marched on, imports through this port included cotton, tobacco, wheat, lubricants, coffee and fruits, which came in large part from the United States; and other products both from America and the rest of the world increased its importance as a port in Germany until it was second only to Hamburg.

Exports through Bremen have indeed been vastly varied during the nearly 150 years of American consular representation there. Much of the infinite variety of steel products of the Ruhr, tires, oils, paints from Hanover, automobiles from Lower Saxony and Hesse, the Rhine- land and Stuttgart, pottery and toys from Bavaria, cameras, machinery and beer from central and eastern Germany and Czechoslovakia swelled the volume of trade and helped to make Bremen become at one time shortly before the first World War the wealthiest city per capita in Germany.

In 1938 three German shipping lines, including the famous North German Lloyd, had their head offices at Bremen and 30 others, including five American lines, had ships calling at Bremen or Bremerhaven. Shipbuilding has also been important there for centuries.

The famous Atlantic liner Bremen, was built in the Bremen yards of the shipbuilding firm of A.G. Weser, launched on August 16, 1928, and floated down the river of that name to Bremerhaven where she was completed and commissioned a year later. The s.s. Scharnhorst was launched from Bremen on Dec. 14, 1934, by Hitler himself, though
it appears that Bremen’s traditional attitude of reserve was not broken down even by him. He never visited the place again though he was scheduled to do so at the opening of a bridge to be named after him on July 1, 1939. Admiral Raeder turned up instead, but neither bridge nor namesake were to survive the war.

BREMEN’S CONSULAR district now includes, in addition to the State of Bremen, that part of the State of Niedersachsen which lies west of the Weser River, the State of Schaumburg-Lippe and all of North-Rhine/Westphalia. In it are the important towns of the Ruhr such as Duesseldorf and Essen, as well as Cologne and Germany’s present capital, Bonn. There was at one time a large number of American residents in the district but the war and its aftermath caused many to leave. A number of American firms, however, including shipping lines, are taking up their connections again and the Consulate General’s business in this direction is on the increase.

Although President Washington highly recommended his new Consul and the latter notified the Bremen Senate of his appointment in high flown language, addressing them as “Majestifics, Nobly Born, Learned and Wise Gentlemen and Super-Gentlemen,” the City Fathers felt that “for reasons of personality” they could not accept him as American Consul. Local records do not enlarge upon his objectionable features, but Washington’s second appointee, two years later, Friedrich Jacob Wichelbaum, found such favor with the severe Bremen Senate (then known as Die Witthheit), that he continued in his post for 35 years and was even then deprived of it only because President Jackson considered that the American Consul should be an American citizen. Both Delius and Wichelbaum were Germans.

Unfortunately, however, the first American to serve as American Consul, Nathaniel Pearce, fared little better than the first German one, for he was refused recognition by the Bremen Senate because his local creditors complained of his many unpaid debts. Subsequent American Consuls appear, however, to have conducted themselves with more circumspection and, together with Wichelbaum, they witnessed the making of much social and political history in Bremen.

The City and its surrounding territory were annexed to Napoleon’s Empire in 1806, freed by the Congress of Vienna in 1815, joined the North German Confederation in 1867 and finally Bismarck’s German Empire in 1871. During this time, thousands of emigrants made use of the Bremen Key to find a new life in a new world just as many are doing today.

THE UNITED STATES Government owns no office premises in Bremen and the consular establishment has been located at a number of addresses. After the first World War its offices were opened at 32 Remberti Strasse, on Dec. 5, 1921, but less than a year later were moved to 145 Contrescarpe. In 1924 premises were taken at 80 Am Wall, but another move in 1929 brought it to 66 Contrescarpe, which building was destroyed during the recent war. On May 1, 1946, the Consulate was
opened at 15 Kurfuersten Allee, now the home of a Masonic Lodge, but shortly thereafter moved to its present address at 20 Contrescarpe (also known as 1-a Meinken Strasse).

Contrescarpe, a quiet residential-appearing street, seems to have drawn American consular chiefs to it like a magnet. Its name probably means "opposite the escarpment," for it skirts the old city moat, and its buildings overlook what was once the site of the city walls. The memory of their gates is preserved in the names of many of Bremen's streets.

The present officer-in-charge of the Consulate General is also a veteran in the American Foreign Service. Consul General Maurice W. Altaffer, who opened the Bremen office after the recent war, has been stationed at most posts in Germany, including the former Embassy, as well as posts in Switzerland, the Levant and Mexico.

Present day members of the consular staff include among its German employees, Heinrich Otte, who has been in US Government employ since 1926. Another well-known name to those who knew Bremen in prewar days was Francis Lane, then Vice Consul, now Consul in charge of the Berlin Consulate. He was in the Bremen Consulate for nearly 20 years.

The present American staff is broadly representative of the United States, being drawn from such widely separated places as Vermont, Texas, South Carolina, Missouri, and a spot or two in the Far West. The present plant consists of a dignified former residence recently owned by the great-grand-nephew of Arnold Delius, one-third of a floor of the large office building known as the Haus des Reichs where the visa section is located, a warehouse at the docks and a small motor pool.

During the early years of the war, an American one-star general, newly arrived in England, inquired of an American consul there who had endured heavy German bombing in one of Britain's major industrial centers: "What does a consul do?" The consul, veteran of more than 20 years in scattered posts, and of a somewhat volcanic nature answered him with thinly-veiled annoyance by inquiring, "Well, what does a general do?" If the general, probably somewhat taken aback, had had a copy of the Encyclopedia Britannica handy he would have found a consul's duties listed thus:

"The duties of the American Consul include discharge and relief of seamen of American vessels; issuing and visaing of passports, settlement of estates of American citizens who may die intestate in foreign countries; issuance of bills of health certifying to the sanitary condition of passengers, cargo and crew of vessels clearing from foreign ports for ports of the United States, and certification of invoices on dutiable merchandise for export to the United States."

This is still substantially true, with the exception of the issuance of bills of health. But it by no means tells the whole story, for the scope and variety of consular functions have grown immensely in the recent past, and those duties mentioned in the short list above would hardly justify the employment of 30 Americans and 54 non-American personnel. For those who like figures, the following statistics may be of interest:

During the 12 months ending September 30, 1949, the Bremen Consulate General performed 1,188 citizenship services, including the issuance of 231 passports; issued 2,759 visas; acted in 1,687 cases involving seamen and shipping and certified 2,382 invoices. 254 commercial as well as 488 economic and political reports were sent to the Department of State for its own use and that of other interested government agencies and nearly 82,000 communications of all kinds were sent out — an average of 725 every working day. During 1949 the Consulate General's transportation section, acting as a small dis-
patch agency, received and forwarded or stored 1,551 tons of official supplies and personal goods and effects for and to consular, High Commission and army personnel and received from the United States and prepared for drivers or owners 190 official and private automobiles, mostly new.

The Bremen office was raised on February 1, 1950, to the rank of consul general in view of the increasing importance of the industrial and political features of its district. It has also under its jurisdiction what may be the smallest career consulate in the world, the American Consulate at Bremerhaven. Vice Consul Robert Houston, Officer-in-Charge, has recently pointed out in a letter to the Foreign Service Journal that he and his single clerk comprise the entire staff and that the number of square miles in his consular district is represented by a cipher. His office performs only shipping and notarial services.

WHILE THE BREMEN Consulate General is, like all other consular offices in Germany, administratively bound to the Office of the United States High Commissioner for Germany, every effort is being made to retain its identity as the official representative of a friendly power and its presence is evidence of 150 years of cordial and mutually profitable commercial, economic and political relations between the United States and Germany.

It is the hope of every member of the staff of the Bremen Consulate General and doubtless of every American consular officer in Germany that consular offices will be able to continue their age-old functions and to be of assistance in promoting a long term policy of friendly cooperation among peace-loving nations and men of good will.

Typhoid Danger Widespread, Makes Use of Chlorine Imperative

In reply to inquiries concerning problems of water chlorination in the US Zone of Germany, Col. Karl R. Lundeberg, chief of the Public Health and Welfare Branch, Office of Public Affairs, HICOG, issued the following statement:

We have heard of complaints from German sources about use of chlorine in water supplies in the US Zone. Chief complaints are that the taste is unpleasant, that the chlorine injures water pipes and equipment, and that it injures wash fabrics.

While we recognize that the taste of chlorinated water may be objectionable, we believe the following facts should be taken into consideration:

Typhoid fever is still widespread in Germany today. This is due in part to the large number of homeless people and refugees from the east, to the many typhoid carriers from previous epidemics, to soil pollution, shortage of rainfall last summer that caused sewage to stagnate in open drains, and, finally, to war-damaged water lines that have not yet been safely reconstructed.

A small amount of chlorine in water provides perfect protection against disease germs, such as typhoid fever.

There is no evidence that the small amount of chlorine used in drinking water damages either pipes, water equipment or wash fabrics. It has been used successfully for more than 30 years in all civilized countries.

For the protection of the Occupation Forces, it is required that the water supply of all German communities where American personnel are living be chlorinated. This work is supervised by US Army sanitary experts.

We hope that all German communities will see the wisdom of giving this protection to the public health by chlorinating water wherever any possibility exists that the water may become contaminated.