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Soul-Sellers, Herring-Boxes, and Desperate Emigrants: A Recipe for Ship Fever in the Early Nineteenth Century

In 1804, a riot by detained German immigrants caused hundreds of dollars of damage to Philadelphia's state-of-the-art new quarantine station, known as the Lazaretto. The Lazaretto opened in 1801 as a means of breaking the cycle of yellow fever epidemics that had devastated the city four times between 1793 and 1799. Overcrowded shipboard conditions and cruel deprivation during the long ocean journey pushed the passengers of the ship *Rebecca* to the limits of their patience. A flotilla of immigrant vessels, each loaded with exhausted and near-starving Germans, many suffering from "ship fever" (epidemic typhus), arrived at the Lazaretto within days of one another, and taxed the station's capacity and supplies beyond their limits.¹

The *Rebecca* riot of 1804 reminds us that enslaved Africans were not the only victims of human trafficking in the United States. While African chattel slavery would tear the country apart within a few decades, a different kind of coerced servitude flourished in Philadelphia, the capital of the early abolition movement. Those aboard the *Rebecca* who did not have enough money to pay their passage were "redemptioners." Their unpaid fares were 'redeemed' through labor on the American side. The word even contains a hint of spiritual uplift. But the riot of the *Rebecca's* redemptioners at the Lazaretto in 1804 gives us a glimpse of the underbelly of America's immigration history. The patriotic mythology of the Statue of Liberty—"I lift my lamp beside the golden door"—has always been at best a very partial representation of that history. But seen from the Lazaretto, where those redemptioners lucky enough to have survived their journeys were disgorged half-dead while ship owners collected their handsome passage fees, the myth seems almost obscene.

The Soul-Selling Business

It was more than the call of freedom or the flight from want that brought these German immigrants to the Lazaretto.² Their journey was made possible by a sophisticated and profitable industry, designed to turn the hopes of the poor into cash. Like most redemptioners, the *Rebecca's* passengers were recruited by “Newlanders” (*Neuländer*)—earlier German-speaking American immigrants who were paid by the ship owners and brokers for recruiting further migrants to follow in their footsteps. From Aarau to Tübingen to Bad Dürkheim to Darmstadt, the Newlanders criss-crossed the most promising regions, where poverty and dislocation had prepared the ground, and where emigration patterns had already been established. Dressed in their finest clothes, complete with ruffles, wigs, and jewelry, they touted America as a place of easy riches. They “conduct[ed] themselves as men of opulence,” one victim complained, “in order to inspire the people with the desire to live in a country of such wealth and abundance.”

They would convince one that there are in America, none but Elysian fields abounding in products which require no labor; that the mountains are full of gold and silver, and the wells and springs gush forth milk and honey; that he who goes there as a servant, becomes a lord; as a maid, a gracious lady; as a peasant, a nobleman; as a commoner or craftsman, a baron.

“Now, as everyone by nature desires to better his condition,” the rueful emigrant concluded, “who would not wish to go to such a country!”³

The emigrant paid more than the cost of the ocean passage. Newlanders might extort their own fee, or volunteer to take possession of the traveler’s cash for “safekeeping.” All worldly possessions were packed into trunks as the journey down the Rhine began. Each city or principality along the way charged its own customs duty—several dozen in all—as delays and expenses mounted. It could take weeks to reach Rotterdam or Amsterdam, where the waiting continued for the departure of an America-bound ship. Even those who had left home with money in hand were by then often broke or in debt. The ship’s captain or his agents often paid off the emigrants’ debts, adding the amount—plus interest—to the fare for the passage. When the time finally came to board the ship and set sail, both the trunks of belongings and the Newlander who had promised to be on the same ship and to safeguard money and valuables were often nowhere to be found. Little wonder that the Newlanders came to be known as *Seelenverkäufer*—“soul-sellers.”⁴

Each individual or family agreed on a fare with the captain before departure. In this human cargo trade, bodies were money, and sea captains had every incentive to cram as many of them aboard as possible. Emigrants were “packed like herring in a box,” it was said at the time—averaging 300 passengers in the smaller vessels (under 200 tons cargo capacity) and reaching up to 800 passengers in the larger ships (250–300 tons capacity) at the height of the trade. Some passengers were forced to sleep on deck, exposed to the elements. Belowdecks, even the cleanest vessel quickly turned foul when crowded with so many sweating, itching, eating, belching, flatulating, excreting, unwashed bodies. Even without any infectious disease, routine seasickness layered another sour stench over the acrid smell of crowded bodies. But these human herring-boxes were also hothouses for “ship fever” or typhus, the disease that killed thousands of immigrants to North America in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. (“The lice abound so frightfully,” said one German passenger on a redemptioner’s ship in 1750, “that they can be scraped off the body.”⁵ In 1909, the human body louse was identified as the vector that carries the germ of epidemic typhus from person to person.)

Wind and weather determined the length of the passage. In unfavorable conditions, cheek-by-jowl in the fetid cargo hold, the hours felt like days, the weeks like lifetimes, and the sickness and death were inescapable. “There is on board these ships,” one passenger lamented, “terrible misery, stench, fumes, horror, vomiting, many kinds of sea-sickness, fever, dysentery, headache, heat, constipation, boils, scurvy, cancer, mouth-rot, and the like, all of which come from old and sharply salted food and meat, also from very bad and foul water, so that many die miserably.” Quality and quantity of food and water were a constant source of complaint. A rock-hard biscuit or two and a few ladles of a brownish liquid that once resembled water was often a day’s full diet. Captains rationed supplies strictly, and whipping or beating awaited anyone who demanded more. If the voyage was unexpectedly long, and the food and water ran out or spoiled, then the human cargo simply went hungry and thirsty. Experienced traders knew that delivering strong, healthy laborers upon arrival meant higher profits, so they had an incentive to safeguard the health of their cargo. But the many opportunistic merchants who quickly converted their cargo holds for emigrant passage in order to profit from surges of migration paid little attention to providing for their passengers. Illness and death were costs of doing business; besides, in many cases, if a passenger died past the halfway point of the journey, surviving relatives were required to pay the deceased’s full passage.⁶

In 1750 and again in 1765, the Pennsylvania Assembly passed laws aimed at curbing the worst abuses of redemptioners and other immigrants, for example by limiting the number of passengers per ship and requiring a

minimum square footage per passenger. But the arm of Pennsylvania's law did not reach as far as the European ports of embarkation, and the new rules proved impossible to enforce. In response to the persistently dreadful plight of the redemptioners, a group of German immigrants joined in 1764 to form the German Society of Pennsylvania. The society fought to help new arrivals and (with only marginal success) to protect immigrants from the worst effects of the entrenched system of redemption and servitude.⁷ The tide of emigrants from German lands ebbed and flowed in the subsequent decades, but in the early years of the Napoleonic Wars, Germans again flocked to Philadelphia in large numbers under the redemptioner system.⁸ Jefferson's Embargo Act of 1807 then turned off the faucet, but pent-up demand for emigration and the agricultural catastrophe of "the year without a summer" flooded Philadelphia with well over four thousand Germans in 1817 alone. During the peak years, fully a third of the German migrants were redemptioners or other servants.⁹

The Long Journey of the ship *Hope*, 1817

During the 1817 wave of crisis migration, thirteen years after the Rebecca riot, conditions deteriorated in the carrying trade. Hundreds of Germans aboard another ship bound from Amsterdam to Philadelphia were "close to a revolution," in the words of one survivor of the ill-fated journey. This ship was called *Hope*, and hope was nearly lost—many times over. Much of the *Hope's* misfortune can be traced to factors beyond human control, but the decisions made by the ship's owner, captain, and crew before and during the voyage show just how expendable they considered its cargo to be.

In the early spring of 1817,—twenty-six-year-old Rosina Gös left her home in the village of Sasbach on the edge of the Black Forest, just across the Rhine from the French city of Strasbourg. With were her husband Matthias, also twenty-six, and their four-year-old son George. It is possible that she did not know it yet, but as she undertook this long and perilous journey, Rosina was pregnant. Along with a group of emigrants from their region, the Gös family headed down the Rhine toward Amsterdam. At some point, the Black Forest group met another group of emigrants from the Aargau district in northern Switzerland, including thirty-four-year-old Jacob Hilfiker, his wife Maria, and their eighteen-month-old son Rudolph, and the lot of them—350 strong—set sail for Philadelphia from the island of Texel just north of Amsterdam.¹⁰ It was the eighth of May, 1817, the wind was favorable, and Captain Geelt Klein of the Dutch ship *Hope* was looking forward to a smooth, quick, and profitable passage.

The good luck lasted just a few minutes. As soon as the *Hope* made it out into the North Sea, the wind disappeared, and for the next eight days the jam-

packed ship floated aimlessly, either absolutely still or fighting a headwind. When the wind finally picked up on May 16, the ship made quick progress into the English Channel. Noticing that the delay had made a severe dent in their food provisions, the passengers asked the captain to land somewhere in England to replenish the supplies. He refused, telling them they had plenty of food for the rest of the journey.

They soon found themselves in the open ocean in strong winds. On June 4, a ship from Morocco sailed near and greeted the *Hope* with a barrage of gunfire, setting out a boat for a boarding party. Captain Klein mustered the crew and as many passengers as possible on deck, arming them with the ship's entire supply of guns and swords. This show of strength deterred the pirates, who promptly made a half moon around the *Hope* and sailed away. Not long after, a violent storm appeared almost without warning, and for two full days and nights battered the ship mercilessly. The masts were nearly snapped off, and almost all of the sails and ropes were torn down. The costly damage and the delay for emergency repairs was bad enough; even worse was the effect on Captain Klein, who became so terrified of further damage—which would cost him money—that for the rest of the journey, as soon as the wind grew strong, he ordered the sails lowered. He gave up entirely on the topmost and side sails. The ship slowed to a plodding pace. After seven weeks at sea, the passengers expected to see the North American mainland any day. When they saw mountains, they were confused, until word spread that they were looking at the Azores, the Portuguese island chain barely a third of the way across the Atlantic. The immigrants' spirits were crushed. They looked at their meager food supplies in despair. Ever since the North Sea delay, Klein had reduced all food and water rations by a third. Realizing that they faced the real prospect of actual starvation, the passengers pulled together enough energy to turn hopelessness to anger. They demanded that the captain land in the Azores and buy food. "We were close to a revolution," survivor Adrian Märk remembered later. When a gang of passengers threatened him, Klein linked arms with all of his crew and faced down the mutineers. There would be no stopping for supplies.

As June turned to July and the *Hope* crept slowly westward, the immigrants' hunger grew worse. Illnesses of all kinds took hold, and the weakened bodies were powerless to fight them off. Ship fever spread throughout the cargo hold that served as the passenger cabin. The deaths began with a family from the Black Forest group; only the youngest son survived to watch his loved ones weighted down with shot, sewed into sailcloth shrouds, and dropped overboard to sink into eternity. A passenger from the Aargau group had been hired as the ship's doctor, but he had been given almost no medications and was all but powerless in those conditions. A few days after the first

deaths, a ship from Liverpool sailed near. Hearing of the widespread hunger and illness aboard the *Hope*, the English captain offered food and medicine. Klein refused the offer. The *Hope*'s passengers, so weak they couldn't stand upright, watched the other ship sail away, its passengers dancing gaily on deck.

It had been eight weeks since Amsterdam. There was no more meat, no more butter, no more cheese or even vinegar or liquor. Captain Klein was now allowing half a daily ration of water every three or four days. The bread was "moldy and inedible," Adrian Märk recalled. The captain had stopped distributing wood for cooking, so the remaining rations of peas, barley, and rice were useless. Adults received only a drinking glass of soup per day. Illness was everywhere, and the pace of death accelerated. Not a day went by without at least one sailcloth casket being dumped into the sea. To make matters worse, it was discovered that thirty of the thirty-two water barrels allocated to the passengers had sprung leaks. Those well enough to do so were reduced to collecting rainwater that had accumulated on deck; it smelled like asphalt and garbage, and no matter how thirsty they were, many could not keep it down. Märk recalled simply, "Our misery was great."

Progress continued to be slow. Four times in the last two weeks of July, the ship got tangled in huge patches of seagrass. Another storm tossed the *Hope* around for four days, forcing the starving Germans to stay belowdecks surrounded by ship fever, and pushing them back eastward as if taunting them. By now, all but three of the crew were also sick, and there were not enough able-bodied hands on deck to guide the ship safely through the storm. Finally—the weary passengers thanked God for at last hearing their desperate prayers—the weather calmed, and five days of favorable winds carried the *Hope* swiftly toward the American mainland. One night, there was a light in the distance. Captain Klein had a big lantern hung at the top of the storm mast, and an hour later, a boat arrived carrying the pilot who would guide the ship through Cape Henlopen and Cape May, and up the Delaware Bay and River toward Philadelphia.

When the pilot boarded the ship, he blanched with horror. The crew and passengers looked more dead than alive. Sensing the urgency of the situation, he overrode the Klein's timidity and ordered all sails hoisted. Only a few passengers were able to stand on deck and take in the scenery. Märk's heart surged with relief and awe at the sight of the New World, with the "dark green oak woods" and "beautiful meadows and plantations" on the banks of the Delaware. The *Hope* sped upriver, making up for lost time, and reached the Lazaretto on August 7. It had been ninety-two days since the departure from Texel. In Märk's words, "the healthiest of us looked like dead."¹¹

Shock and Reckoning: The *Hope* at the Lazaretto

The flood of German immigrants to Philadelphia that year—more than forty percent of them redemptioners—was well underway at the time. The previous peak year was 1804, the year that culminated in the *Rebecca* passengers' riot. Even before that crisis, the Lazaretto officials had found themselves utterly unable to accommodate so many people in quarantine at one time. After an appeal to the state legislature for funds, in early 1805 the Board of Health erected a new building at the Lazaretto—informally called the “Dutch House,” thanks to a common confusion between Dutch and *Deutsch*—for the accommodation of healthy passengers under quarantine. But nothing could have prepared the Lazaretto officials for the 1817 season, when Germans came to Philadelphia at more than double the rate of 1804.¹²

The first ship Lazaretto physician George Lehman and quarantine master Christopher O'Conner inspected on August 7 was the ship *Johanna & Elizabeth*, also from Amsterdam, carrying 421 redemptioners and other migrants. Because of the overcrowding he found aboard, Lehman detained the vessel, admitted the sick to the Lazaretto hospital, and sent the remaining passengers to the Dutch House. Then he saw the *Hope*.¹³

During the official questioning, Captain Klein reported just a few cases of illness aboard. Lehman had been on the job for only two months. Just twenty-four years old, he was barely four years out of the University of Pennsylvania medical school, but his political connections to Democratic Governor Simon Snyder got him appointed to the Board of Health the previous year, in 1816. He would go on to serve for nineteen years on Tinicum Island, more than three times longer than any other doctor in the Lazaretto's history. When he finally retired, he had seen it all. But on that August morning in 1817, he didn't need years of experience. He had only to open his eyes to dismiss Klein's protestations out of hand. He had never seen anything like the groaning mass of gaunt, pale creatures he found aboard the *Hope*. The ship had left Amsterdam with 346 passengers aboard. Forty-eight had been buried at sea. Ten or twelve more arrived showing just the faintest signs of life, and did not survive long enough to be admitted into the Lazaretto hospital, which immediately filled up with the most desperate cases. About 120 were so sick that they were unable to eat or drink. “Most of those remaining,” Lehman reported, “were so feeble and exhausted that they could with difficulty walk to the house provided for their reception.”¹⁴

Lehman had a job to do, and it was getting more overwhelming by the minute. He immediately sent word to turn the passengers from the *Johanna & Elizabeth* around, and send them back aboard their ship for the time being. It was crowded and dirty, but it was palatial compared to what Lehman saw

on the *Hope*. Those passengers from the *Hope* who were least acutely ill were sent to the Dutch House. Amid the confusion and sickness, stepping over corpses and soon-to-be-corpses, Lehman could barely stifle his anger. Reflecting on that moment a day or two later, he wrote:

Justice and humanity demanded that the *Hope*, in her wretched situation . . . should be first attended. She is a living sepulcher. The slave trade has been abolished, as contrary to the laws of God; so should this inhuman traffic. Three, four, and five hundred poor and ignorant creatures, are stowed in one vessel, conveyed to a far distant country, living on provisions that we would sometimes hesitate to give our beasts.

The quality of the *Hope's* bread became notorious. Coarse and sour even when not moldy, it was roughly ground from the chaff and the hard outer layers of whatever grain it came from, with little actual flour. Lehman said even hogs wouldn't eat it. A newspaper said a piece of it "would cause the blood of every human person to chill." Another observer called it "the worst I ever saw."¹⁵ But what chilled Lehman's blood was more than the quality of the food. It was the entire system that generated profits from misery through what amounted to the purchase and sale of human beings. The ship owner or captain or consignee might be villainous, or perfectly virtuous. It wasn't the individual but the structure of human trafficking itself that caused such suffering, ship after ship, year after year.

Lehman, O'Conner, and Lazaretto steward James McGlathery had little time for philosophizing. A couple of days after the *Johanna & Elizabeth* and the *Hope*, the ship *Vrouw Elizabeth* arrived from Amsterdam, also full of German redemptioners (477 total passengers). Then came the *Xenophon*, likewise jammed full of redemptioners: 484 passengers had left Amsterdam, and 49 (mostly children) had died en-route. With the approval of the Board of Health, Lehman ordered the *Johanna & Elizabeth* disinfected as quickly as possible and then sent up to the city with all of her healthy passengers. But that still left well over a thousand passengers at the Lazaretto. Most were destitute, and many were starving and sick. After an emergency meeting with Lehman, the quarantine master, and the Lazaretto steward, the Board of Health reported that "a more distressing scene has not been witnessed at the Lazaretto since its establishment."¹⁶

The next two weeks were a whirlwind of activity. Of course, the board immediately ordered the vessels under quarantine to be cleaned, whitewashed, and fumigated as extensively as possible, with special procedures prescribed for the *Hope*.¹⁷ But what about all those people? Meeting their immediate

material needs was not only a humane imperative; it could also prevent discontent from boiling over into violence. The board and the quarantine officers were determined not to allow a recurrence of the redemptioners' riot this time. The steward McGlathery had been a member of the Board of Health in the early years of the Tinicum Lazaretto, and he remembered how much trouble provisioning could cause. So did George Budd, a current member of the board. He had been the Lazaretto steward in 1804, when the redemptioners rioted.

It was concerning but not altogether unusual when a passenger from the *Hope* named Swigelar escaped from the Lazaretto with his children during their quarantine. There were known to be occasional breaches in the high fences that surrounded the station. Whenever there was an "elopement," the board put out the word in the city either through informal channels or through newspaper notices. It occasionally offered a reward, and often the escapee was caught and returned to quarantine. What Swigelar did, however, was unheard of. After making his way to Philadelphia, he left his children there and went *back* to the Lazaretto (likely sneaking in through the same hole in the fence). There he was accused of "using such conversation as tended to excite mutiny and dissatisfaction among the passengers." After the harrowing journey of the *Hope*, it shouldn't have been hard to stir up discontent. As soon as McGlathery got wind of this agitation, he put Swigelar under detention at a nearby tavern where he could not be a disruptive influence on the quarantined masses. (The Board of Health sent out a messenger to find his children and place them under proper care.) The troublemaker was later moved to an isolated room in the Lazaretto itself that was used as a prison when needed. This confinement changed Swigelar's attitude; within two days he was released "after making proper concessions for his misconduct."¹⁸

Meanwhile, McGlathery and the Board of Health had their hands full housing, feeding, clothing, and caring for the arrivals. The Dutch House wasn't big enough to accommodate more than a fraction of them, and all the tents in Philadelphia might not have sufficed. A board delegation met with the U.S. customs collector for the Port of Philadelphia, who agreed to allow the board to temporarily house passengers in the huge customs warehouse next door to the Lazaretto, normally used for storing and ventilating potentially contaminated cargo. The Health Officer hired an emergency assistant physician and two nurses in the city and sent them down to the station right away. All tents in the City Hospital's possession were requisitioned and also sent down. A committee was appointed to make plans for setting aside a wing of the City Hospital for the Germans if necessary. A delegation from the board met with the German Society of Pennsylvania to solicit their help in providing relief for the miserable newcomers. After McGlathery reported that

he couldn't possibly feed so many starving mouths, the board hired a baker to help him. When he needed more food and supplies, the board told him to purchase them and keep a separate account, to be charged to the Philadelphia consignees of the *Hope*. Lehman reported an urgent shortage of medicine, and the board's secretary procured them and sent them down. More nurses were needed—German-speaking ones—and the board hired them. Extra nurses and provisions continued to be requested, and supplied, through the expiration of the quarantine season in October.¹⁹

Shortly after the *Hope's* arrival, the board ordered “twenty rough coffins” to be “sent down forthwith.” Five days later, they ordered twenty-five more. A month later, twenty-five more. Forty-eight of the *Hope's* passengers who were alive (if only barely) upon arrival at the Lazaretto died there, bringing the ship's full death toll to ninety-four. Given the eyewitness descriptions, it is surprising not that so many died but that 252 passengers somehow *survived* the voyage and were restored to some semblance of health at the Lazaretto. Some were hospitalized for as long as two months.²⁰

The Gös family from the Black Forest—pregnant Rosina, Matthias, and young George—survived. Baby Maria Anna, whose name would soon be Americanized to Mary Ann—was somehow born safely, either at the Lazaretto or not long after their quarantine ended. They became the Gase family of Pennsylvania; a second daughter, Elizabeth, followed four years later. Rosina lived to age 66, and Matthias and the children all survived into their late 70s. Sometime in the 1820s, they moved to Perry County in south central Ohio, then in the 1830s to Seneca County in northwestern Ohio, where many of their descendants still live today. The Hilfikers from Aargau—Jacob, Maria, and little Rudolph—also survived, and settled in Montgomery County north of Philadelphia, where four more children were born over the next ten years. That generation eventually scattered throughout Pennsylvania, Indiana, Illinois, and Nebraska. (Their descendants include the clothing designer Tommy Hilfiger.) Adrian Märk was detained for four weeks with his wife and three children. After recovering from her serious illness, his wife shared a room with a woman who was despondent after the grueling ordeal she had been through. Her threat to commit suicide so traumatized Märk's wife that she fell ill again, and their nursing baby subsequently died. Märk nevertheless credited the medical care and “very good food” they received at the Lazaretto for saving many lives. The family stayed in Philadelphia only three weeks, then bought a carriage and horses and headed west across the mountains, settling in Pittsburgh where Märk found work as a hatmaker.²¹

Meanwhile, the Board of Health set out to recover the extraordinary costs incurred at the Lazaretto because of the *Hope* disaster. The Philadelphia merchant firm of Glazier & Smith was registered as the consignee, and would

normally be responsible for costs associated with its passengers' board and medical care while in quarantine. After the firm did not respond to a request to send down clothing for the *Hope* survivors, the Board of Health sent a delegation to investigate. On August 20, two weeks after the ship's arrival, Glazier and Smith informed the board that after a "disagreement with the captain," the firm no longer considered itself the consignee of the *Hope*. This complicated matters considerably. Another delegation visited the Dutch consul, who insisted that because none of the passengers were Dutch citizens, he had no stake whatsoever in their welfare, but because the ship was Dutch owned, he would defend the owners' interests vigorously. A three-month legal wrangle ensued in which the board's solicitor reaffirmed the collective responsibility of the *Hope's* owners, captain, and consignee for quarantine-related costs, and the board tried to apportion those costs to the appropriate parties. Two board members spoke with Captain Klein at the Lazaretto in early September, as the *Hope* was being prepared to come up to the city. They told him he would be billed not only for the supplies needed to outfit the ship, but also for all supplies furnished to all passengers and sailors while at the Lazaretto. Klein acknowledged the former, but pretended not to understand the latter. The board finally calculated the total amount due: \$2,980.13. It billed Glazier & Smith \$404.56 for the expenses incurred while that firm was the consignee of record, and the balance to the "captain or owner." Glazier & Smith paid their bill, and promptly began negotiating on behalf of the Dutch owner. A payment plan was eventually arranged whereby the board received full payment, plus interest.²²

The German Society of Pennsylvania took little comfort in this financial resolution. As bad as the *Hope* disaster was, it was also a symptom of a larger problem that needed to be addressed. As part of their effort to "assist and relieve" the German immigrants, the society sent John Keemle to the wharves as an interpreter. He was able to get candid first-hand reports from the new arrivals, just out of quarantine, about how they had been treated, and he was angry enough to challenge the captains face to face. Keemle bemoaned the cruel treatment that had reduced his fellow Germans to "the lowest state of poverty and wretchedness," and that forced the society to come to their aid lest they "perish in our streets for want, which as a Christian and enlightened people we cannot tolerate."²³

The passengers on the ship *Vrouw Elizabeth* complained bitterly of harsh treatment at the hands of Captain Blackman. He withheld bread for days on end. He kept them on salt rations as if they were still at sea, and the salt-preserved meat was too salty and tough to chew or swallow. He regularly demanded more money from the passengers for nonexistent expenses or for services that were included in their fare, like medicine and cooking. When

Keemle confronted him, Blackman admitted matter-of-factly, “Yes sir, they are all against me,” then waved him off, saying that as a foreign subject he was answerable only to his own country’s laws. Keemle shot back that he was mistaken, and that he would abide by Pennsylvania’s laws or be banned from the port of Philadelphia. Blackman’s response was to complain to Keemle that he had been forced to refund \$1,000 in unjustified fees. In their eyes, Keemle reported back to his colleagues at the German Society, the captains were the only law aboard their vessels.²⁴

After visiting several other immigrant vessels and interviewing their passengers and captains, Keemle finally saw the *Hope* after it had come up from the Lazaretto, cleaned and disinfected. He asked Captain Geelt Klein about Dr. Lehman’s report that hundreds of “famished and emaciated beings” had been taken from his ship. Klein “blustered out, ‘Poh, poh, who cares for the doctor there? I am a subject of a foreign power.’” Keemle bristled. (“I grew warm,” he confessed to his colleagues.) At last, his indignation boiled over. “You are mistaken,” he spat out at Klein. “We will let you know that you shall conform to our laws and regulations, and if you do not like them, away with you from our shore! Who the devil sent for you?” Later, Klein demanded a \$10 fee from each of his redemptioners who was bought, “for expenses incurred at the Lazaretto.” The German Society promptly filed suit, and forced him to refund the money.²⁵

Keemle’s indictment of the captains and their employers was harsh. No doctor on board. Medicine chests barely stocked enough for 10 or 12 patients. (One captain told passengers who asked for medicine, “*Geht und kauftein schnaps!*”—“Go buy some liquor!”—which he then sold them.) “Lost to every sense of feeling for the sufferings of their fellow creatures.” “If they can only get their money, enjoy themselves, and gratify their infernal passions, it is all they care and look for.” As for the immigrants, many told Keemle they had lost everything during the Napoleonic Wars (“Bony’s ambitious bloody war”) and sought only to improve their lot in “a peaceable and happy country.” Instead, they “fell into the hands of avaricious merchants and cruel-tempered captains, who treated them as bad as Bony’s soldiers did.” Keemle calculated that if they provided adequate food and supplies, and boarded fewer passengers per vessel, ship owners could still make a healthy profit from the immigrant trade. But he concluded that only a new law with tough penalties, strictly enforced, could remedy the evils that he had described.²⁶

When the *Hope* finally left Philadelphia to return to Amsterdam in late December 1817, Geelt Klein was at the helm. However, when the ship next crossed the Atlantic in the spring of 1818 en route to Baltimore, it had a new captain named Hancock. Adrian Märk reported in his account that Klein was fired and fined \$100 for his misconduct.²⁷

By the first week of October 1817, the last of the Amsterdam ships had finished their quarantines, all but twelve of the patients in the Lazaretto hospital had either died or recovered, and operations were winding down for the year. Because of the unprecedented volume of patients and healthy passengers, the quarantine season had been extended to October 15. James McGlathery, the 44-year-old steward who had somehow managed to feed, clothe, and supply so many hundreds of sick and hungry Germans for week after week, and keep order at the overwhelmed station, could finally breathe a sigh of relief that the chaos was over. But his labors had taken their toll, and the exhausted steward was stricken with a sudden fever. On October 7, just over a week before the season was to end, James McGlathery died — the last casualty of the ill-fated journey of the ship *Hope*.²⁸

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Notes

¹ Philadelphia City Archives, Minutes of the Philadelphia Board of Health (MPBH), December 27, 1804 and January 10 and April 25, 1805; John Christian, *Autobiography of John Christian Exeter Township*, PA, 1865, 5-19.

² There is no direct evidence that either Jacob Schweitzer or Johan Christen was a redemptioner or indentured servant. At least 100 of the *Rebecca's* passengers—mostly Swiss Germans like Schweitzer and Christen—were redemptioners, see *Poulson's American Daily Advertiser*, September 10, 1804. I focus on Schweitzer and Christen in this narrative because documentary evidence survives about their lives in the United States after arrival, and about their descendants to the present day.

³ Cheesman A. Herrick, *White Servitude in Pennsylvania: Indentured and Redemption Labor in Colony and Commonwealth* (New York: Negro Universities, Press, 1969 [1926]), 184-5; August Ludwig Schlözer, Briefwechsel Göttingen, 1777, quoted in Karl Frederick Geiser, *Redemptioners and Indentured Servants in the Colony and Commonwealth of Pennsylvania* (New Haven, Tuttle, Morehouse & Taylor, 1901), 18-9.

⁴ *Ibid.* Those who had experienced passage with redemptioners wrote pamphlets home warning against the abuses of the trade, famously *Gottlieb Mittelberger, Gottlieb Mittelberger's Journey to Pennsylvania in the Year 1750 and Return to Germany in the Year 1754*, trans. Carl S. Eben (Philadelphia: John J. McVey, 1898); see also Hannah Benner Roach, 'Advice to German Emigrants, 1749', in Marion F. Egge, ed., *Pennsylvania German Roots across the Ocean*, Genealogical Society of Pennsylvania, Special Publication No. 8 (Philadelphia: 2000), 41-53.

⁵ Herrick, *Pennsylvania*, 188; Mittelberger, *Journey*, 20.

⁶ Herrick, *Pennsylvania*, 188; Marianne Wokeck, *Trade in Strangers: The Beginnings of Mass Migration to North America* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999), 77-80; Sharon V. Salinger, *"To Serve Well and Faithfully": Labor and Indentured Servants in Pennsylvania* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 93-6.

⁷ See Zonderman, this volume.

⁸ This movement was heavily tied to a rise in religious separatism in core regions of emigration; see Karl J. Arndt, *George Rapp's Harmony Society: 1787–1847* (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1965), and more recently Eberhard Fritz, 'Religiöse Rebellen im grenznahen Dorf' in *Der Enzkreis: Historisches und Aktuelles* Bd.15 (Ostfildern: Thorbecke, 2016), 179–205. Movements occurred largely up to 1806, before the principal battles between Napoleonic and German forces. Departures peaked during 1802–3, coinciding with the peace of Amiens, with arrivals subsequently reaching the United States in 1804.

⁹ Farley Grubb, *German Immigration and Servitude in America, 1709–1820* (London: Routledge, 2011), 343–5.

¹⁰ The following narrative of the *Hope's* ill-fated journey is based on "The Journey of the Ship Hope," a first-hand account written a year after the fact by Adrian Rudolf Märk in Pittsburgh, PA, and published in the *Swiss Messenger* newspaper in Aarau, Switzerland, number 50 (December 10, 1818), 393–4, and number 51, December 17, 1818, 401–5, translated by Alfred Hilfiker and reproduced at <<http://www.gase.nl/InternettreeUSA/ship%20hope.htm>>, consulted May 29, 2015.

¹¹ The foregoing narrative is drawn from Märk, "The Journey of the Ship Hope."

¹² Grubb, *German Immigration*, 344–45.

¹³ *Grojan's Philadelphia Public Sale Report*, August 18, 1817; "Extract of a letter from the Lazaretto," *National Advocate*, August 11, 1817.

¹⁴ Märk, "The Journey of the Ship Hope"; MPBH, August 11, 1817; *Philadelphia True American*, quoted in *Ladies' Weekly Museum*, August 23, 1817.

¹⁵ "Extract of a letter from the Lazaretto," *National Advocate*, August 11, 1817. The letter is unsigned, but passages such as "I immediately remanded the healthy passengers on board the *Johanna*" could only have been written by the Lazaretto physician. *Philadelphia True American*, quoted in *Ladies' Weekly Museum*, August 23, 1817; *New-York Evening Post*, December 11, 1817.

¹⁶ *Poulson's American Daily Advertiser*, August 12, 1817; *Relf's Philadelphia Gazette*, August 12 and 15, 1817; MPBH, August 11 and 12, 1817.

¹⁷ MPBH, August 8 and 13, 1817.

¹⁸ MPBH, August 18, September 3 and 5, 1817.

¹⁹ MPBH, August 7, 8, 9, 11, 12, 13, 16, and 18, 1817.

²⁰ MPBH, August 11 and 16, 1817.

²¹ Ronald A. Gase, "American Gase Family Tree," <<http://www.gase.nl/Internettree/fl1923.htm#P2477>>, consulted June 2, 2015; John E. Hilficker, "Brief Summary of the Family of Jacob Hilfiker/Hilficker/Hilfiger," <http://www.hilficker.addr.com/hilficker/hilficker_genealogy.htm>, consulted June 2, 2015; John Hilficker, personal communication, May 28, 2015; Märk, "The Journey of the Ship Hope."

²² MPBH, August 14, 19, 20, 21, September 1, 5, 8, 11, 12, 17, 18, and November 21, 1817.

²³ *New-York Evening Post*, December 11, 1817..

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Relf's Philadelphia Gazette*, May 13, 1818; Märk, "The Journey of the Ship Hope."

²⁸ MPBH, October 4, 7, 11, and December 23, 1817.