

Letter from the Wendish migrants to Australia written at Cuxhaven and published in the Wendish Newspaper, 1851

Dear Mr. Schmalzer,

As, having attended to a number of matters, I still have some time, I shall use it to keep my promise to you to describe in as detailed a way as possible our journey from Bautzen to Hamburg and from Hamburg to the sea.

You know, my dear Wendish friend, that 92 Wendish citizens left home on Saturday, August 16, and departed from our Wendish city of Bautzen that afternoon at about 2.00 o'clock. We wanted with God's help to be in Hamburg on August 17th. We had arranged for a train beforehand, so that everyone had to pay only half the fare from Dresden to Leipzig and from Leipzig to Hamburg and could also take 100 lbs. of luggage free. We did not have to pay anything for children up to two years and for children up to ten years we only paid half of the adult fare. Those poor people who had certification of their poverty from the Government, traveled from Bautzen to Dresden without charge. In order that there should not be a big delay at Dresden, we had to send a notification beforehand to the railway office at Dresden, containing the names and ages of all of our migrants. For that reason we had purchased (geloest) the tickets only as far as Dresden. Therefore we had to extend these in Dresden according to the forwarded notification. But as several people did not take sufficient notice of this and had bought tickets from Bautzen to Leipzig, there was a delay in Dresden. This prevented us from going any further on that same day. As some had already paid their fare as far as Leipzig, the notification and our accounting did not agree. Before we could straighten all this out, the train had left for Leipzig. We therefore stayed overnight in Dresden, and this was enjoyed by all. After the evening meal we began to sing Wendish hymns. As a result many strangers visited us, even though it was already late. On the next day, August 17, we settled into our carriages at the Dresden station at 5.00 am and traveled to Leipzig, arriving there at 8.30. We sang almost all the way. At Leipzig I went to the accountant of the railway administration and explained to him that several of us had made the mistake at Bautzen and had bought tickets for Leipzig, and that they had not yet received a reduction. I asked him whether we could not have our money repaid. He thereupon spoke with the committee and returned the money. The chief agent of our ships owner (Schiffsherr) at Hamburg, who lives in Leipzig and serves the whole of Saxony, provided us with the tickets from Leipzig to Hamburg and we received only eight fares for the whole group. We left at midday from Leipzig, instead of waiting for the night train which would actually have been the better train on account of its speed. The reason for this was that some of us wanted under all circumstances to see the great cities by daylight in which Hermann Franke, Bogacki and others have worked with great blessing for Christianity: Halle, Koethen, etc. We traveled through these cities, arriving at Magdeburg at 3.30 p.m., and leaving again at about 6.00 pm after vespers in order to get as far

as Wittenberg(e). But as the Elbe is already very wide at Wittenberg(e) and the railway bridge is not yet completed, we had to cross the Elbe on the steamer. It was already dark and some of us were very tired. When therefore many suddenly saw the mass of lights before them, they boarded the ship with great fear. However, after the crossing, when they had to leave the ship, several of them did not want to do so.

After the crossing, which took place at 9.30 pm, we stayed overnight at Wittenberg(e). On August 18 at 6 am we left Wittenberg(e) for Hamburg and arrived in that city at 10.50 am. The proprietor of the guesthouse "Stad Neuyork" was waiting for us and we went with him. We came to an agreement with him to pay him 15 Mark per person over 10 years for hospitality, overnight accommodation and meals. Children under 3 years did not have to pay anything. Everyone enjoyed the spacious rooms and the good meals. We cannot praise the great helpfulness of the landlord - in Hamburg where you cannot trust anyone any further than you can see him!

We had a lot to do in Hamburg on August 18 and 19, as our ship was due to leave from Hamburg on August 20 at 6.00 am. Only 40 migrants arrived from Silesia, as the remainder want to come only in the month of October. As therefore there were fewer of us, we took a smaller ship than had previously been envisaged. The ship was called Helena. She is quite newly constructed and this is her maiden voyage. As they had been waiting for us since August 15th they had begun to load various things. Even though we had written to them that we would be taking along a lot of luggage, they did not imagine, as they said, that there would be so much. They had therefore already filled so much space that there was no room for our things. It was therefore necessary for the crew to unload the goods that they had already loaded, which they did very unwillingly. Because of this unwillingness they stacked some of the things that we would have liked to have had with us at the bottom. For this reason a strong feeling of dissatisfaction developed on the evening of August 19th. We immediately informed the man in charge of the whole operation that our group of migrants would issue a complaint to the government if they did not receive justice. I had therefore to go to the ship at 5 a.m. to see to it that those things which had been stored too far down would be brought up again. At the same time I had to point out the beds that I wanted for our people. I then noticed suddenly that our women and children and all the others had arrived and had begun to board the ship. Everyone was very cordial. As the water here is not yet deep enough for the ship, the ship as well as a smaller vessel which carried many of our things were attached to a steamer which brought them to the town of Stade, not far from the city, arriving at 8.30.

I, Ponich of Rachlauch, Lischka (Fuchs) of Rascha and Rentsch of Cortnitz remained behind in Hamburg to attend to different matters and only followed our people by steamer at 2.00 pm. At about 3.30 we arrived at Stade, but it was almost evening before we had the opportunity to reach our ship which was anchored about 2 hours from the wharf. As we came to our people, we noticed

that there was a great deal of dissatisfaction. The main reason for this was the fact that in the process of loading very little care had been taken of the various boxes. It is no wonder, though, that the sailors lost patience, as they had often had to reload the boxes which weighed 15 cwt. three times. On August 21 we had to settle up for the luggage exceeding the agreed space. Each person was allowed to take things amounting to 20 cubic feet free of charge, whilst every additional cubic foot cost 22.5 new silver shillings. However the measurement with which our things were measured seemed too small and this and that passenger was being charged for more cubic footage than he had, and there was nothing but dissatisfaction regarding payment. I went to the place where the luggage was paid for and told them that no-one was allowed to pay any more, as I had received a recommendation from others to write to the Senate or the police at Hamburg requesting them to examine the assessment as well as other situations that we wanted straightened out by the government. At the same time I referred to the shipping laws in which the rights of the migrant were set out by the Hamburg Senate and by which all the shipping business was judged and penalties imposed. Thereupon I closed the door and sat down to write. Soon after this the Supervisor of the ship's owner (Schiffsherr) went to a number of those who had not paid and remitted them 15 thalers, sometimes more and sometimes less. He also said that he wanted to work together happily with us. We therefore did not proceed with the correspondence. Several of us arranged to have several boxes returned to Hamburg, so that they could be brought along by the ship that was following us in October. Our ship was however not overloaded, because much of what we had was not heavy but took up much room, such as 60 sheep, several pigs and poultry, and all the feed for the animals.

The anchor of our ship was raised on Saturday, August 23rd at 8 am and we reached Glueckstadt at about 11.00 am. As all our arrangements except for the doctor, were completed, we began to make music and to sing hymns. We also spoke about Sunday's divine service. The Wends agreed to have theirs in the afternoon, and so the Germans decided to have their service in the morning. No one was allowed to interfere with our preparations. On the whole ship I have not found more than two who objected to these arrangements. Everyone had to go along with us, because we enjoyed the complete liberty of the friendly captain. At Glueckstadt we waited for good weather and had to manage without a doctor for that time. As there were still a number of matters with which we were not satisfied, I set out a letter of complaint and wanted to send it to the police at Hamburg. There upon the captain came to me and said that I should first of all direct a request to the ship's owner. I therefore wrote out the letter of complaint and added that, if the ship's owner did not meet all of our requests, we would lay a charge according to paragraph 14 of the shipping laws. I went with several others of our people in our little boat to deliver the letter in Glueckstadt. On this journey we pondered on the omnipotence of God. For due to the bad weather our boat was hurled to and fro in the water in such a way that the sailors who were rowing the boat either could not reach the water with their 5 yards long oars or the water stood much higher than our boat. The waves are almost like jellied stew (gesetzte

Fleischbrüche) and look as though they could not break (abreißen). We tried to leave early on August 31st but after several hours we had to turn back on account of the bad weather. It was only on the morning of September 3rd that we left Glueckstadt and arrived at Cuxhaven about midday, a distance of 19 miles from Hamburg. As we came alongside, the doctor arrived, bringing letter from the ship's owner which satisfied us completely.

Today, on September 4th, we are sailing on the high seas. We will probably not call at Brazil. There is therefore no hope of further news until the Lord brings us to our predetermined goal. And as we edify ourselves on this Lord and can speak to him in full freedom and as a great love reigns amongst us, the time is passing very quickly for us.

The Lord be with you and with us and accompany us all to his eternal blessedness.

On the high seas near Cuxhaven, September 4th, 1851

Johann Zwar.