



HISTORY OF PASSPORTS

Travel documents were systematically issued by the end of the 1700s, in the wake of the French Revolution. The leaders of the new republic implemented sovereign-issued travel documents to prevent the French nobility from escaping the guillotine. Anyone trying to cross the newly guarded borders and leave France without a travel document was immediately arrested.

Other European monarchies soon followed suit. They wanted to prevent the revolutionaries from entering their countries and spreading the cry for liberty.

Early travel documents were very different from contemporary passports — such documents would generally consist of a large sheet of paper containing written information. The holder of this travel document would fold it up and carry it with him as he traveled.

Tom Topol, an expert on passport history and passport collecting, believes that he may own the earliest extant passport booklet. It was issued in 1866 in the Kingdom of Saxony, in Leipzig, and has relatively advanced security features such as a coat of arms watermark and embossed graphics and letters.

Passport photos, a critical element of current passports, were not introduced until World War I. Until then passports merely listed the bearer's basic physical characteristics: male or female, short or tall, and the eye and hair color. This written description was not very definitive unless the traveler had a unique distinguishing mark like a scar or tattoo.

HISTORY IN PASSPORTS

While some collectors collect passports to study the development of travel documents, others study travel documents to learn about travel routes and means of travel in various eras. Passports also shed light on the travelers themselves and the prevailing society. Who was traveling 150 years ago, before paved highway systems and commercial aviation made it easy to move from place to place? Why were they traveling?

Other passport collectors focus on geographic points of interest. They want a

passport — or sometimes just a visa stamp — from every single country and monarchy. Passports from extinct countries are of special interest.

Tom Topol's collection revolves around his fascination with passport pictures. His passion for historical passports was triggered in 2003 when he picked up a 1934 Japanese

passport at a flea market in Kyoto, Japan. The picture showed a demure Japanese woman wearing a beautiful kimono. The picture was much more attractive than current, standardized passport pictures, and it piqued his interest.

Today, the many passports in his collection parallel the slow institution of standardized guidelines for passport photos. His earliest passport photos were not limited in size: A photo could be used as long as there was room to mount it on the passport page. Photos also depicted people in varying poses: sitting, standing or even riding a horse or playing guitar.

In 1926 the United Kingdom specified a size for passport photos and the rule that the subject must be “full-faced and without a hat.” Other

countries soon did the same.

The first colored photo in Topol's collection is from the 1940s. By the 1970s, all passport photos were colored. Today's passports sport digital, biometric photos. And in the future, Tom theorizes, passports

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may become obsolete altogether, as passport information will be passed along electronically, eliminating the need for paper copies.

PASSPORTS LINKED TO OTHER AREAS OF INTEREST

Topol and the community of passport collectors focus their collections specifically on travel documents. Nevertheless passports can also be significant assets to other types of collections.

For instance, the most expensive passport ever sold at public auction was sold for a staggering \$263,000. This high price was reached not because it was a travel document but rather because of its bearer. The passport had belonged to an American baseball celebrity. A collector interested in this baseball legend shelled out thousands of dollars for the “merit” of holding onto his hero’s travel document.

People, as well as museums, purchase passports because of their interest in the passport bearer, a historical event or a historic era.

JEWISH PASSPORTS

It’s not for nothing that we are known as “Wandering Jews.” Over the centuries the centers of Jewish population have shifted many times over. Passports and other travel documents provide a tangible record of Jewish immigration trends. They also sometimes mark historic occasions of special Jewish significance. There is

a growing trend toward passports of Jewish interest.

For instance, Gal Wiener, CEO of Winner’s Auctions, had a “Sugihara Salvation Visa” for sale at a recent auction. “I was very moved when I received this item,” he says. “I’d heard so much about these visas. I knew that the entire Mir Yeshiva and *talmidim* from other yeshivos were saved with these miraculous documents.

“The passport was stamped by two [who are listed as] Righteous Among the Nations: the Dutch consul in Lithuania, Jan Zwartendijk, who wrote that there was no entry visa needed to Curaçao, and Sempo Sugihara, who gave a transit visa through Japan.

“The passport that I held was for a Polish Jew named Yisrael Gorodecki. These papers saved his life. Holding the papers and seeing the visas stamped within them made the whole escape from Lithuania come alive for me.”

Travel documents related to Eretz Yisrael/Palestine are also of special Jewish interest. In 1939 the British White Paper limited Jewish immigration to Palestine. Immigration certificates were hard to come by. All travel documents related to legal immigration to British-controlled Palestine during those years are collector’s items.

So the next time your passport expires, think twice before tossing it into the trash. Maybe you’ve visited an exotic location, undergone a dramatic travel experience or traveled on a special day, and maybe — just maybe — your passport would be of interest to a passport collector. ■



The following Holocaust-related passports will be up for sale at the upcoming auction of Winner's Auctions on July 19, 2016.

Passport issued by the German Consulate in New York in 1939. Even though it was issued on American soil, it bears anti-Semitic marks as stipulated in the Nazi Nuremberg Race Laws.

On October 5, 1938, as an extension of the Nuremberg Race Laws, the offices of the Third Reich issued a law canceling the passports of all Jewish citizens unless they were marked with the letter "J." On January 1, 1939, another clause was added obligating Jews with non-Jewish names to add the name Israel or Sarah to their passports.

This passport belonged to Leo Neumann, who was born in Berlin in 1881 and lived in Zurich. The passport was issued by the German consul in New York on April 25, 1939, and was extended twice in 1940. The large "J" is clearly marked at its start and his name is listed as "Leo Israel."

In 1939-1940 the United States still had full diplomatic relations with Germany (the U.S. entered the war in December 1941), and the German consulate continued to function in New York. The consul, Heinrich Franz Johannes Borchers, upheld the anti-Semitic laws. He was arrested at the end of the war with senior Nazis such as Ribbentrop and Hans Frank.

These Nazi symbols issued in America are very rare. German Jewish citizens did not want to leave the United States, so they did not bother to extend their German passports. Of course there probably were some German citizens — like Leo — who needed to renew their passports. Since it was signed at the German consulate, American authorities were not involved, and could not protest the anti-Semitic markings.



Passport of Walter Schulze Bennett, the head of German military intelligence in the Netherlands, who helped rescue Jews. Germany, 1938-1941.

This is the Ministerialpass (diplomatic passport) of Walter Schulze Bennett, head of the Nazi Abwehr (Intelligence) in Holland. Bennett was the mastermind of the Aquilar Campaign. This campaign rescued 176 Dutch Jews by claiming that they were spies for the intelligence agency. Bennett headed the campaign and even accompanied the Jews to ensure their safety. Bennett worked under the command of Admiral Wilhelm Canaris, who opposed Hitler's reign.

In 2015, Bennett was nominated for the title of Righteous Among the Nations.



German passport from the Nazi era, bearing the additional Jewish name “Israel” in accordance with the anti-Semitic laws. Its bearer traveled on the infamous “Voyage of the Damned” — the 1939 voyage of the MS *St. Louis* as it tried to find refuge for its Jewish passengers, but was forced to return to Europe.

This passport was for Ernst Boas Phillipi, who was born in Berlin in 1889. It features an exit permit from Germany dated May 10, 1939, an exit stamp from Hamburg on May 13, 1939 and a permit to enter Holland from the *St. Louis* on June 16, 1939. It also has a visa from the Chilean consul in Rotterdam dated September 15, 1939, and an entry stamp into Chile on November 30, 1939.

After Kristallnacht in November 1938, German Jews frantically tried to leave the country, but there was nowhere to go. Over 900 (939 exactly) refugees, most upper-class citizens, paid fortunes for tickets and visas to board the *St. Louis* and sail to Cuba.

The ship later earned the title “Voyage of the Damned” because its passengers were refused entry by all countries where they might have found refuge.

The captain, Gustav Schröder, an anti-Nazi German, was dedicated to helping his passengers. When the ship reached Cuba, the passengers were informed that the country had canceled their entry visas. After unsuccessful negotiations with the U.S. and Canada, the ship was forced to return to Europe.

The captain refused to return to Germany, and an arrangement was made to distribute the passengers among France, Belgium, England and Holland. About 250 of these passengers died in the Holocaust after the Nazis took over France, Belgium and Holland.

The bearer of this passport, along with his wife and two sons, traveled on this voyage to Cuba, the United States, and then back to Europe, where they were among the 181 passengers who disembarked in Holland.

According to the archives of the Holocaust Museum in Washington, the husband, Ernst, was sent to the Sachsenhausen concentration camp in 1938, before his journey on the *St. Louis*. He and his family survived the war.

