

Why collect old passports?

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www.passport-collector.com

MUCH LIKE STAMP or coin collectors, passport collectors gather passports for their historical, cultural, or aesthetic value. They may seek out passports with unique designs, rare visas, or those belonging to famous individuals. Some passport collectors focus on specific types of passports, such as diplomatic passports or passports issued during certain time periods. Passport collecting can offer historical insights into global travel, diplomatic relations, and special events. Collectors may also enjoy the thrill of acquiring rare or unusual passports through auctions, online marketplaces, or trading with other collectors. Additionally, passport collecting uncovers travel stories and routes of its bearers.



5 Passport photos were not subject to strict rules in the early days



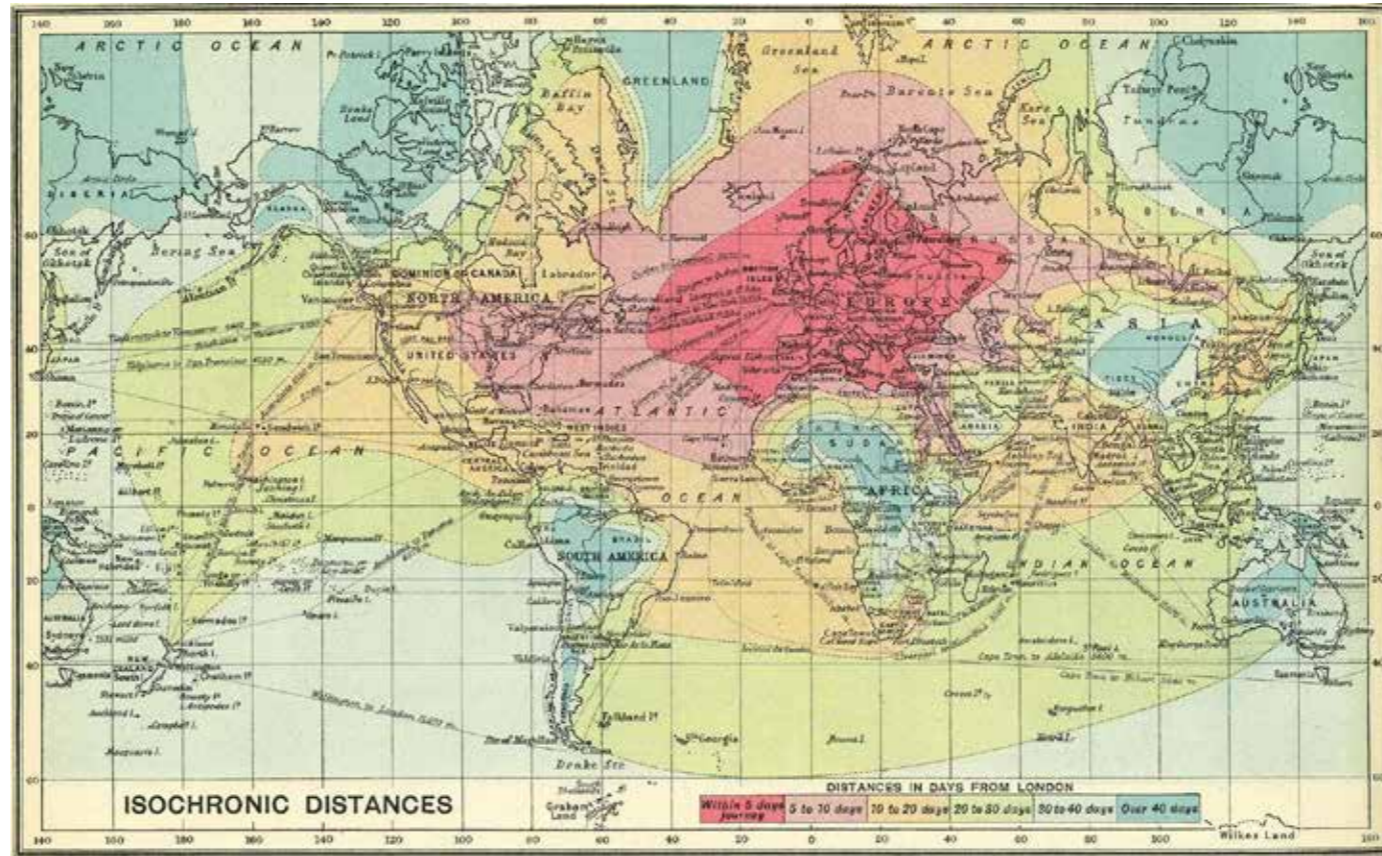
usually had a validity between one and five years. In most Western countries this changed in the 1990s to two, three, five or ten years. Travel documents up to 1970s included several countries and territories which are now defunct, such as Sarawak, North Borneo, Ionian islands, Nyasaland, or Arden Protectorate.

The first British passport

It is commonly asserted that the term 'passport' finds its etymological roots in the French expression *laissez-passer*, signifying 'safe-conduct'. Safe-conduct licenses were first mentioned in the 1414 Act of Parliament during Henry V's reign, and were regularly dispensed by the English authorities. Such documents were 'English' rather than 'British'. At that time Scotland and various regions of Ireland remained beyond the dominion of English monarchs until the enactment of the Act of Union in 1707, if not later.

Are passports ephemera?

The Cambridge Dictionary defines ephemera as, 'Objects that, when they were produced, were not intended to last a long time or were specially produced for one occasion'. Early passports had only a validity for a specific journey from A to B, or a short validity of weeks or months. Passports from the 1920s to 1980s



The map illustrates travel distances from London to destinations worldwide, ranging from 5 to 40+ days

4 A German Southwest African passport from 1915, a rare ID document during German Colonialism.



3 German ambassador to the Ottoman Empire from 1915. His passport photo alone is the size of a postcard.



The current passport collector's market

It can be challenging to add anything novel to a passport collection. What collectors generally term 'common documents' are most prevalent. Although many specialize in booklets, single-sheet and folio passports promise a more thorough and comprehensive exploration of a country's passport history. Prices for such documents fetched up to €7000 a decade ago; today the most expensive passport in 2024 will sell for €640 and most documents seldom exceed €300.

The author's focus

As a native German, the author's focus is Germany, including East Germany. He holds significant German travel documents, such as the passport issued by the Duchess Anna Eleonore of Hesse from 1646 who sent out her messenger. Anna Eleonore ruled the duchy from her widow's seat at Herzberg Castle, known as the cradle of the English royal family (House of Hanover), since Anna Eleonore gave birth there to the Elector of Hanover, Ernst August, father of the English King George I. The huge passport of the German ambassador to the Ottoman Empire from 1915. His passport photo alone is the size of a postcard (3).

The diplomatic passport of a German courier sent to the peace negotiations to Versailles in 1919 after Germany lost the Great War.

Or the German Southwest African passport from 1915 for a native, a rare ID document during German Colonialism (4).

Additionally he seeks out unique and intriguing passport photos, which were not subject to strict rules in the early days and included photos of people on skis, horses, park benches, with dogs, and even holding guns! (5)

Legal note on passport collecting

Passport collecting is legal as long the documents are obsolete or canceled and there is a good reason for your collection, such as historical research.

Most countries declare by law that passports are government property. The definition of 'Government property' is stated in most passports or country-specific passport laws issued within the last 30-40 years. Older passports (100 years old and more) do not have such a statement at all - not on the document nor in the passport laws at that time. 🇩🇪