

Tom Topol

LET PASS OR DIE



2nd Edition with more pictures & stories

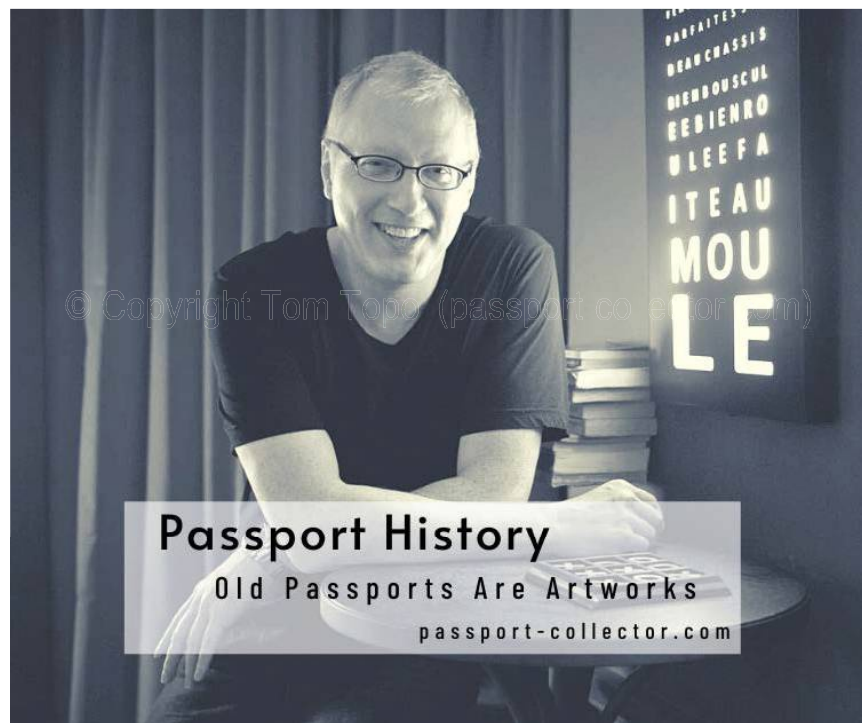
Passport History

- Beautiful Old Passports
- Curious Passport Photos
- Exciting Stories
- The Future of the Passport

Digital Edition

LET PASS OR DIE

Passport History



Beautiful Old Passports • Curious Passport Photos
• Exciting Stories • The Future of the Passport

Tom Topol

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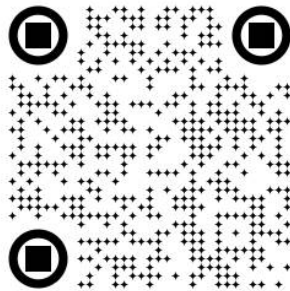
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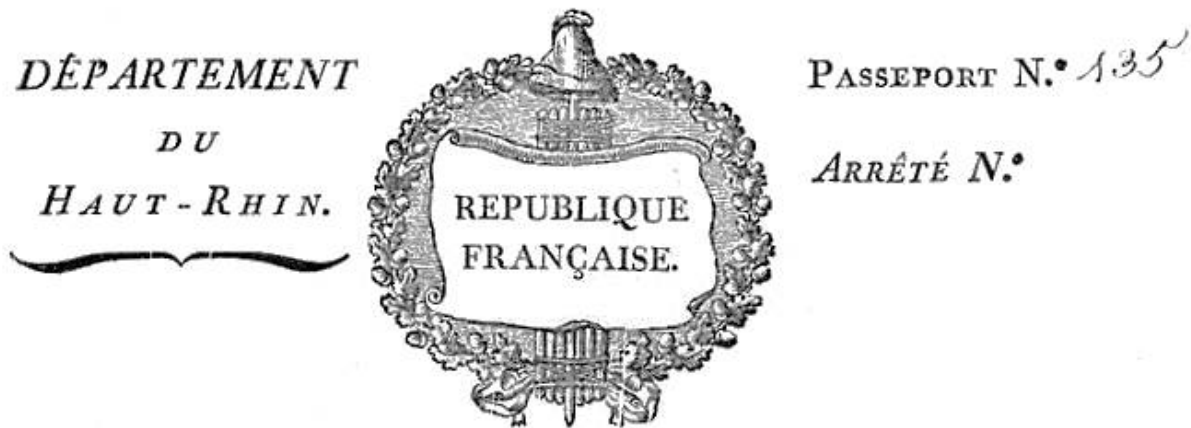


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Etymology - Passport



Only in the late **15th century** did the word "**PASSPORT**" come into use (signifying permission to enter or leave a port): from French **Passeport**. From passer > 'to pass' and port > 'seaport.'

*"A **passport** gained one respect abroad."*
- Casanova -

*"My face is my **passport**."*
- Vladimir Horowitz -

*"The **passport** is the noblest part of a person. It does not come about as quickly as a human being. A human being can come into existence anywhere, in the most careless way and for no good reason, but a passport never does. For this, he is also recognized if he is good, while a human being can be so good and still not be recognized."*
- Berthold Brecht -

Acknowledgment

Incredible, fantastic stuff has been happening! I got the book all finished, it's been all put together, and best of all, it's been supported by wonderful people who put their hearts into helping this book.

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Thank you

About Me

In 2003 I found my first old passport at a flea market in Kyoto / Japan. An excellent Japanese document from 1934 shows a beautiful young woman in her Kimono. A piece of art compared to the current standardized travel documents we all use today. Since then, my passion has become passport history, research, and collecting old passports.

My website Passport-collector.com has been online since 2010, with around 1.2 million page views/per year. I consult readers, collectors, news outlets, foundations, and museums on passport history.

Plenty of my articles were published with notable partners like the BBC, Business Insider, The Guardian, CNN, etc. I also write for renowned companies in the security printing industry. TV and Film companies contact me when they need support on a specific old passport for their production. The Netflix series Babylon Berlin was just one such collaboration. [Here is my reference list.](#)

A highlight for me was my assistance for the US State Department for an exhibition in Washington D.C., “*From Pirates To Passports,*” for which I received an Award from the State Department.

Another fantastic collaboration was with Vacheron Constantin, the oldest watch manufacturer globally.

The Swiss company sent his photographer to portray me for “*Collector’s Island, No.8.*” - their exclusive magazine for VIP customers with an edition of only 800 copies. Worldwide, only 80 collectors were portrayed within eight years. I am honored to be one of them.

Please make sure to [sign up for my newsletter](#). I can keep you updated with even more passport history facts and news.

Tom Topol
December 2022

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Preface, Or: Why This Book?

This book will give you an overview of roughly 500 years of passport history. These pages contain insights on selected, rare examples of travel documents from the past, including extinct countries, fantastic stories, and astonishing passport photos.

Identification papers, until the 14th century, were a privilege. Only from the 15th century have passports become somehow obligatory. For the first time, issued to soldiers, especially mercenaries who had returned from war and for whom such a document served as a letter of dismissal.

We discuss historical people, ordinary people, celebrities, heroes, and criminals with their experiences during their journeys in different periods. You will be surprised by the beautiful passport photo of a young Japanese woman in her Kimono during the Japanese Empire and some remarkable passports from territories that no longer exist, like German-Austria, Ionian Islands, or Manchukuo.

Furthermore, you will obtain insight into the value of old passports, including the most highly valued passport ever sold. The book includes 230 pictures and is a vital source for interested readers and collectors alike.

Old passports are “Artworks.” Why? Because of the handwriting, the colorful border and revenue stamps, and of course, the passport photo. I often collect a passport only because of its unique or unusual passport photo. In

the past, each passport was an extraordinary document compared to our standardized passport booklets today. Old passports tell the story of a person and will take you back to a time when traveling was not an everyday leisure activity like it is today. When we discuss old passports, it's also always about traveling, which, back then, took several days or weeks and sometimes months.

This book is for everyone who enjoys the topic and wants to learn more about passports and history. However, I do not claim the book teaches you everything, but you will learn the core facts you need to know to get a comprehensive overview of passports and their history. With my long-time experience and knowledge, you will get a fantastic book about this rather unusual topic, entertaining you simultaneously. Physical travel documents as we know them today might disappear in the coming 20 years as travel, especially air travel, is significantly growing. Our society aims to optimize traveling into a seamless process while increasing security measures concurrently. Nowadays, some countries issue only electronic visas (which you don't see on your passport). Biometrics like, facial recognition and fingerprints are significantly on the rise. So, you will also learn about modern passports, their technology, and their future.

A Word On The Second Edition

Only available as eBook. Corrections were made, pictures remastered, and most importantly - the book got plenty of additional content.

This digital edition has 20 more chapters, 80 more pages, and 30 additional pictures.

Fascinating travel documents, exciting stories, photos, and current passport facts await you.

Only eBook readers get access to exclusive online content with live links and QR codes in this digital edition, giving you even more vivid knowledge.

For the best reading experience, this digital edition is optimized for tablets. If you use an Android device, **ReadEra** is an excellent eBook reader choice, with plenty of useful functions and tools.

Recommendation Letters Before Passports

Before tourism (traveling for pleasure, without a real purpose) was expected, only the powerful and determined would take to the roads and seas – at least until 1841, when Thomas Cook invented package tourism. A typical 16th-century passport was a handwritten document on paper issued by a local lord, administration, or senior military officer. The primary purpose of the passport was not to identify the bearer but to act as a ‘letter of recommendation,’ a safe conduct to support the traveler on their journey when entering or crossing foreign soil. Issuing passports was not an exclusive right of the state either in the 16th century. Once an assistant had written up a ‘passport,’ his master would sign and seal the document. The signature and wax seal served as a sign of the issuer’s authority and as security measure to avoid falsification. As passports had a purely functional character back then, more detailed descriptions of the bearers got added to the early modern passport, which initially was no more than a sealed certificate for a person named by name. Physical characteristics such as size, hair and skin tone, conspicuous scars, or moles migrated from early passports to more modern versions. But this was only true for the poor; wealthy and high-ranking European travelers were exempt from describing their bodies and registering their ‘special characteristics.’ Their passports contained only names, and the fewer personal details they had, the more effective they were. As Casanova wrote in his memoirs in the 18th century, *a passport gained one respect abroad*. Most liberal countries in Western and Central Europe abolished a passport for

foreign travel in the last third of the 19th century. Due to the nostalgic idea of traveling across Europe without visas and identity papers, many call this period ‘the golden age of travel.’ In 1888, English and French railway companies promoted the luxurious journey on the Orient Express from London to Constantinople, on which there was no need to change trains or present a passport, and wealthy people specifically – first-class passengers, so to speak – were exempt from passport requirements and compulsory checks. At the end of the 19th century, something that came up was the vital link between passport and nationality. From the 17th until well into the 19th century, many people traveled with passports issued by their destination country and not by their country of origin: Any official document was a proof of identity. By 1914 however, passport and citizenship were closely linked. The passport was thus not only a certificate of identity but also a certificate of affiliation.

Passport Design In History

Passports have changed their form, content, and function through the centuries. When were the first passports issued, and what was their purpose? What were these passports made of, and how were they produced? Was there even something like a passport design back then? And what about the security of early travel documents? The answers to these questions may surprise you.

Until the end of the 19th century, no one was seriously thinking about the design of passports. A passport had a

purely functional character. However, as passport function changed, new requirements emerged regarding durability, security, and standardization, which affected the design of passports.

Timeline

- 15th C: Invention, handwritten documents, wax seals
- 16th C: Paper featuring watermarks
- 17th C: First printed forms
- 18th C: Systematic use of passports, embossed elements
- 19th C: First passport booklets
- 20th C: League conferences (first steps on standardization), ICAO standardization, MRTD, security paper, and features
- 21st C: 4th generation MRTD, BAC, EAC, LDS2, Polycarbonate data page, plenty of security features

Durability © Copyright Tom Topol (passport-collector.com)

In the mid-19th C, British and Belgian passports consisted of fragile paper, only 0.02 mm thick. As paper this thin was not readily available, this might also have been a security feature. For comparison, a modern newspaper sheet has a thickness of 0.07 mm, and current polycarbonate pages are 0.6-0.8 mm thick. Back then, a travel document was a large folio folded several times to fit in a pocket or wallet. Such a thin paper document quickly became fragile if not treated with care.

The Belgian passport below was damaged instantly by simply signing it with a rather sharp quill or shortly after when the thin paper got blatted.



Belgian passport 1844

Wealthy, notable, and frequent travelers got their documents from passport agents, who put the passport in an impressive leather wallet and reinforced the thin paper with a layer of linen to make the passport much more durable.

The linen backing (Inset in the picture above) makes the passport 0.9 mm thick, considerably improving from the original 0.02 mm thin paper. Generally, 'alterations' to passports by adding a layer of linen were tolerated. A wax seal on a passport was often a weak spot if the wax was too heavy for the fragile document. Over time, fragments of the seal could break off, damaging the passport even further. In the 17th and 18th centuries, paper was thicker and more durable but often made from rags (recycled fibers from used textiles). It was coarse and rough compared to the paper made from wood pulp introduced in the 19th century.