

PASSENGER FARES OF THE CUNARD LINE AND THE BUSINESS OF MASS MIGRATION ACROSS THE NORTH ATLANTIC

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Late nineteenth and early twentieth century transatlantic migration was not only sizable and long-lived, it was also the core business of the first large-scale and long-distance multinational travel industry. British shipping lines pioneered the transport of migrant passengers on oceanic steamships in the mid-1800s, and were still important carriers half a century later, despite the shift in migrant origins from northwest to southern and eastern Europe by the 1890s. My recently completed dissertation, “The Business of Transatlantic Migration between Europe and the USA, 1900-1914” is the first comprehensive Europe-wide study of this migration as a travel business. I am currently in the process of presenting some dissertation results in articles, some of which require additional archival research, while also revising the dissertation itself for publication.

There has long been a scholarly consensus that the government statistics usually relied upon for quantitative measurement of migration flows are often incomplete and inconsistent. Important components of transatlantic migration, such as rates of return to Europe, and the role of travel costs, have hence remained relatively unclear. Relevant data in the archival records of shipping companies and conferences has been scarcely analyzed until recently, partly due to insufficient quantitative data-gathering in prior historiography.

The most complete and detailed source of revenue and passenger information for this period are the records of the Cunard Steamship Line at the University of Liverpool. These contain a

consistent accounting of Cunard's principal Liverpool-New York route starting from the early 1880s. This rare continuous documentation of passenger movements and receipts enables derivation of a time series of effective transatlantic fares, the lack of which has long plagued migration histories.

I have already compiled and published quarterly data on Cunard's fares and passengers for the years 1903 to 1914 (in an article in *Research in Maritime History*, volume 33). The seasonal and cyclical fluctuations revealed in this quarterly time series underscore the importance of such variability to the risk and return of shipping companies' migrant transport business. This supports a key conclusion of my dissertation: that risk and risk-management, more so than costs or short-term profit maximization, dominated North Atlantic passenger shipping lines' strategies during this "Great Migration."

Thanks to the timely support provided by the BAC Bursary Award, I will now be able to extend the quarterly series of Cunard's passenger and fare statistics back as far as 1885. I hope to publish these data in an article for *Business Archives Sources and History* that will discuss some of the technical and interpretative aspects of using such business archives to shed light on issues in social and economic history. I believe that the article will also provide new insights into the passenger trade of the Cunard Line, and the patterns of transatlantic migration, during what is sometimes referred to as the "first era of globalization."



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