
Series notes for series A11936

Indicators

Average file size: standard

Digital image charge: Standard

Function and purpose

This series consists of Migrant Selection Documents for Displaced Persons who travelled to Australia on the ship Dundalk Bay departing Trieste, Italy on 16 March 1949.

Displaced Persons Scheme

At the end of the Second World War many thousands of people who had been brought to Germany from occupied countries to labour in German industry were unable or unwilling to return to their homelands because of occupation by the army of the USSR (mainly Poland and the Baltic countries - Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia - as well as Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Ukraine, etc.) These people came under the care of the International Refugee Organization (IRO); they were screened, given the status of Displaced Person and housed in camps in Germany, Italy and Austria.

On 21 July 1947, the Commonwealth Government entered into an agreement with the IRO covering the resettlement of European Displaced Persons (or 'DP's, as they were commonly referred to) in Australia.

Under this agreement, the IRO undertook responsibility for provision of transport and the care of the Displaced Persons until their disembarkation in Australia. The Commonwealth undertook selection in Europe and responsibility for reception in Australia, placement in employment and care after arrival.

Eligibility for selection was initially based on standards of age, physical fitness and the ability to do manual work. At first, Australia was only interested in accepting single Baltic people, however restrictions on nationality were relaxed as the scheme progressed. As Australia's annual quota increased the

Department of Immigration accepted other nationalities which included Czechoslovaks, Yugoslavs, Ukrainians, Hungarians and Poles.

On 29 April 1949, the scheme was extended to include all European nationals whose Displaced Person status was recognised by the IRO. (The IRO constitution requires eight pages in which to list the conditions of eligibility.) All applicants within the worker age limits under this scheme undertook to remain in the employment found for them by the Commonwealth for a period of two years from the date of their arrival, and their continued residence in the Commonwealth was subject to their observing this undertaking. At the end of this period, these migrants could be granted indefinite admission to the Commonwealth.

Migrants under this scheme were eligible to receive health and medical service benefits, sickness and unemployment benefit, maternity allowance and child endowment.

To ensure suitable arrangements for the reception of the DPs and their absorption into the community, the Commonwealth set up Reception and Training Centres principally at Bathurst and Greta in NSW, Bonegilla in Victoria, and Northam in WA .

At these centres the DPs were medically examined and x-rayed and interviewed individually to assess their employment potential. During their stay in the Reception and Training Centres, usually about three or four weeks, they were given a course of instruction in utilitarian English and the Australian way of life, and were paid a special social service benefit from which an amount was deducted towards the cost of their upkeep.

When the IRO wound up its activities in 1951, the Commonwealth agreed to receive those Displaced Persons already accepted for migration whose passages had still to be arranged. This continued until 1954, bringing the total number of arrivals under this scheme to approximately 170,700.

Physical characteristics of records

The record for each person consists of two main documents:

1. A screening card which shows the Displaced Person's name, date of birth, sex, nationality, educational standard, fluency of languages, IRO eligibility, address of relative in Australia, religion, particulars of dependents, civil offences, literary test, date of arrival at the Processing Centre and from where, the reason for coming to the Centre, employment in the past and suggested employment, signed undertaking, acceptance, and signature of Selection Officer.
2. The International Refugee Organisation Medical Examination Form includes the Displaced Person's name, date of birth, colour of eyes and hair, weight, height, name of camp and location, place of birth, signature and a medical questionnaire including x-ray negative. A passport size photograph is usually attached to this document.

Control of the Records

The records were transferred to the custody of the National Archives at various times and in various arrangements, with no uniform system of control. It has therefore been necessary for the National Archives to impose one.

The correspondence records of the Department of the Immigration indicate that it was standard practice to refer to individual Displaced Persons by their Nominal Roll number.

The ship's nominal roll is a list of all the passengers (that is, all the Displaced Persons) who were on board when the ship sailed from its port of departure. The roll is assembled under various categorisations, firstly the camp from which the person came and secondly by family or marital status, the names being arranged in an alphabetical sequence within each of these categories. (Each person is individually listed whether a single person travelling alone or a member of a family group travelling together.) When the list was finalised a simple sequential number was imposed against each name, from beginning to end, and this number is the person's Nominal Roll number.

The National Archives has adopted this number as the essential control for these records, the Nominal Roll number being the 'control symbol' for each entry in RecordSearch. Where a succession of persons listed constitute a family group the documents for each of those persons have been placed in one folder. They constitute one record item and are represented by one entry in RecordSearch, the control symbol in this case being not a single number but a range of numbers. For example, a Control Symbol of '112-116' indicates a family group of

five people with nominal roll numbers 112, 113, 114, 115 and 116.) Names and dates of birth of each person appear in the Title for that entry.

It often happened that there were some vacancies at the last minute due to the selected persons being unable to travel for whatever reason, usually ill health. These vacancies were filled by taking people from a pool of reserves. The Reserves were added to the end of the nominal roll and numbered in a new sequence with an R prefix .

The sequence of numbers, together with the sequence of Reserves, for one voyage constitutes a series.

(Many copies of the normal roll were created and sent to the Department's Central office in Australia from where they were widely distributed to government departments and agencies involved in the program. Copies can therefore now be found in the archives of various agencies as well as in the records of the Department of Immigration itself. A copy of the nominal roll for this voyage of the Dundalk Bay is on file A434, 1949/3/5824).

The Ship and the Voyage

A vessel of just over 7,000 tons at launching, the Dundalk Bay was built in 1936 in Germany for the North German Lloyd shipping line. Originally named Nurnberg she operated a cargo service with limited passenger capacity between Bremen and the West Coast of America. At the outbreak of the war she was requisitioned by the German navy and served in various roles, ultimately as a depot ship in Copenhagen. At war's end the ship was seized by the Allies as a war prize and used for a time by the Royal Navy.

In 1948 the ship was sold to a Belfast company which operated the Irish Bay Line and was renamed Dundalk Bay. When, shortly after, the owners obtained a contract with the IRO to transport emigrants from Europe, the ship was rebuilt at Trieste, with very basic accommodation for over 1000 being provided in the former cargo areas.

Dundalk Bay made a total of eight voyages bringing Displaced Persons to Australia, though one of them was primarily to New Zealand, only a few

disembarking in Australia. The first five voyages, all in 1949, were from Trieste; thereafter her home port in Europe was switched to Naples.

In 1951 Dundalk Bay reverted to her former role as a cargo ship. Sold to a British company in 1953 she was re-named Westbay in 1957 and was finally retired from service in 1962 being broken up for scrap at Hamburg Germany at the end of that year.

Dundalk Bay made this voyage under charter to the IRO to bring Displaced Persons to Australia, sailing from Trieste, Italy on 16 March 1949 with 1024 New Australians on board under the Displaced Persons Scheme. Dundalk Bay called at Fremantle where two passengers disembarked.

Passengers Nominal Roll Nos 657 and 658, Mrs M. Roigas and child, Kersti were landed at Fremantle for the child to be admitted to the Princess Margaret Children's Hospital.

Dundalk Bay arrived in Sydney Saturday, 16 April 1949 with 1022 passengers. Five children were conveyed to the Prince Henry Hospital, Little Bay suffering from measles and chickenpox. These children were No 88, Anna Hallela; No 129 Tonis Korvema; No 208 Slobadan Radojevic; No 835 Ingrid Reni and No 844 Viestrur Siniuks.

The remaining passengers proceeded by special trains to the Department of Immigration Reception and Training Centre, Bathurst

Sources

Year Book of the Commonwealth of Australia, No. 39, 1953 and No. 42, 1956
A434, 1950/3/5824

Peter Plowman, *Passenger ships to Aust and NZ 1945-1990: Emigrant Ships to Luxury Liners*, NSWU Press, 1992 p. 92