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## Holland America Line Rotterdam I Fact Sheet

### First departure on October 15, 1872

The steamship Rotterdam departed the city of Rotterdam Oct. 15, 1872, and arrived in New York on Nov. 5. The length of the crossing between Rotterdam and New York depended largely on the weather conditions. On average it took from 15 to 20 days.

### Rotterdam or Rotterdam I

The first ship was called Rotterdam and later given the name Rotterdam I. The serial number designation only came into use when the shipping company started using a certain ship name more often. The ship 'Rotterdam' from 1872 sank in 1883. In 1886 the NASM (the predecessor of Holland America Line) bought a ship that they wanted to name 'Rotterdam' again. To avoid confusion, this new ship was given the serial number designation II in the shipping company's fleet list. That numbering did not originally belong to the name of the ship.

### Dimensions of Rotterdam

The dimensions of Rotterdam I 150 years ago were very modest. It was 81.84 meters long and 10.9 meters wide. By comparison, the Rotterdam VII is 300 meters long and 35 meters wide. Ordered as a steamship, Rotterdam I also had extensive options for using sail and could therefore be rigged as a brig with 10 sails. The sails were often used when the wind was blowing in the right direction, saving coal and/or helping to maintain higher speeds.

### Number of Passengers on the First Trip to Rotterdam

Crew on the 'maiden trip' from Rotterdam were one captain and 43 crew members, consisting of the forward crew and the engine room crew aft. The number of crew members differed slightly per trip, depending on the number of passengers. On this first voyage, in addition to the crew, there were 10 cabin passengers and 60 'between-deck emigrants'. Most cabin passengers were probably Dutch; most of the steerage emigrants were probably non-Dutch.

### Price of a Ticket for the Crossing

The first-class cabin passengers paid fl. 65 (or \$36) for their crossing to New York. Converted into today's currency (2021), this equates to approximately €3,385 (or US\$3,405). The price of an emigrant ticket ranged from fl. 36 (or \$20) to fl. 45 (or \$25), which in today's currency (2022) equates to approximately €1,875 (or US\$1,895) and €2,345 (or US\$2,365).

### Accommodations Aboard Rotterdam

The first steamship Rotterdam had only two classes that were strictly separated. There was standard accommodation for 8 to 10 (first-class) cabin passengers and for about 500 (third-class) 'between-deck emigrants'. There was no mixing or social interaction between first- and third-class passengers. First-class had accommodations on the upper deck in the midship deckhouse in cabins and a cabin/salon. Third-class had Spartan accommodation in lofts under the spar deck along the sides of the hull, and on the steerage in large common areas that functioned as lodgings and dormitories. (A spar deck is located above the main deck.)

### First-Class Cabin On Board

The first-class passengers had 'comfortably' furnished cabins that each had a comfortable bed (a 'cage' in ship's jargon) and an armchair, washbasin with night mirror, an ordinary cosmetic mirror, a candlestick and an oil lamp. The cabin also contained a water carafe with a drinking glass, sheets, a pillowcase, towels, a cage curtain, and a porthole curtain. No light or open fire was allowed in the hut after 10 o'clock in the evening. Smoking was also not allowed in the cabin. The cabin passengers ate their meals and recuperated in a 'comfortable' cabin, also known as 'the saloon'. In addition to a large table with extensions, there were also four benches (with loose cushions), a sofa (with cushions and 'state curtains') and a sideboard with mirror. There were two hanging lamps, two stoves and a sign for glassware.

### **Third-Class Accommodations On Board**

The third-class consisted of large, sporadic and poorly ventilated areas (for 6 to 12 people) under the spar deck or partitioned areas (for 20 to 40 people) on the steerage. Due to the inadequate population register and the personal data submitted from it, it was not possible to determine who was 'really' married. The shipping company did not take any risks in that regard. Men and women were strictly kept from each other in separate rooms. Married couples with children were housed with peers. However, they were completely separated from the accommodations for the men and/or women. The emigrants had to bring their own blankets and eating utensils. The cages, which were sometimes stacked up to four high, could usually only be reached via the foot end, because there was usually little or no space between the cages.

### **Food On the Go**

The first-class passengers were offered a meal in the saloon four times a day: breakfast at 10 o'clock in the morning (barley, meat and fish with bread and tea); coffee at noon (on Sundays and Wednesdays interspersed with chocolate milk); dinner at 4 o'clock in the afternoon; and at 8 o'clock in the evening 'bread and tea' (if desired). Usually a cow, some sheep, chickens and ducks accompanied the ship. They were the suppliers of milk, meat and/or eggs respectively. Feed and hay were taken on board for these animals. The 'between-deck emigrants' were fed from the galley without further ado; probably three times a day: in the morning breakfast (barley), in the afternoon a 'hot meal' and in the evening at 6 o'clock 'supper' (bread with tea). They ate at simple tables with benches next to their sleeping places. The steerage guards distributed the food. In good weather a meal was served outside on deck, guards scooped the food from large cauldrons onto the plates of the passing emigrants. These people then went down again with their plates.

### **Wanting to Leave Europe for New York**

Emigrants from the Netherlands were often poor farm workers with large families who fled their poor conditions of poverty and unemployment, hoping to find work and a good life in the New World. There were also those who left for reasons of faith, especially from the Dutch Reformed house, who went to found their own 'undisturbed' church abroad. The emigrants also often came from Eastern Europe, in the hope and expectation that they would have a better life in the New World than in their region of origin.

### **Figures and numbers**

Between 1873 and 1914, the countries with the top number of emigrants from the Netherlands were: 1. Russia, 2. Austria, 3. Hungary, 4. Netherlands, 5. Germany, 6. others. The numbers of people are 31,835 were from Russia, 5,403 from Austria, 4,391 from Hungary, 2,224 from the Netherlands, 1,446 from Germany, and 3,717 from others; three quarters of those sailed with Nederlandsch-Amerikaansche Stoomvaart-Maatschappij, now Holland America Line.

### **Which Names Appear the Most on the Passenger List?**

The Dutch names De Vries and Jansen, both names with all kinds of variations of double "s" and "sz," appear the most. However, many names were written down phonetically by the transit agents who arranged the travel tickets. For example: Smirnoff could also be Smirnov or Zmirnovf. Most emigrants could not read or write and were only interested in getting to the other side of the ocean, and it was of secondary importance to them by what name.