

After 88 Years - Four-masted Barque PEKING Back In Her Homeport Hamburg

Four-masted barque PEKING - shifting Wewelsfleth to Hamburg - September 2020

On February 25, 1911 - 109 years ago - the four-masted barque PEKING was launched for the Hamburg shipping company F. Laeisz at the Blohm & Voss shipyard in Hamburg. The 115-metres long, and 14.40 metres wide cargo sailing ship had no engine, and was robustly constructed for transporting saltpetre from the Chilean coast to European ports.

The ship owner's tradition of naming their ships with words beginning with the letter "P", as well as these ships' regular fast voyages, had sailors all over the world call the Laeisz sailing ships "Flying P-Liners". The PEKING is part of this legendary sailing ship fleet, together with a few other survivors, such as her sister ship PASSAT, the POMMERN and PADUA, the last of the once huge fleet which still is in active service as the sail training ship KRUZENSHTERN.

Before she was sold to England in 1932 as stationary training ship and renamed ARETHUSA, the PEKING passed Cape Horn 34 times, which is respected among seafarers because of its often stormy weather. In 1975 the four-master, renamed PEKING, was sold to the USA to become a museum ship near the Brooklyn Bridge in Manhattan. There the old ship quietly rusted away until 2016 due to the lack of maintenance. After returning to Germany in very poor condition in 2017 with the dock ship COMBI DOCK III, the PEKING was meticulously restored in the Peters Shipyard in Wewelsfleth to the condition she was in as a cargo sailing ship at the end of the 1920s. However, the rudder blade was fixed so that later visitors can turn the large double steering wheel without the rudder blade constantly moving back and forth.



On the day before the PEKING was shifted to her new berth in the port of Hamburg, numerous visitors took the last opportunity to see the ship at the shipyard quay from the ramp of the former sturgeon ferry directly opposite.

On Monday, September 7th, 2020, the PEKING, and its 30-person hauling team left the Peters Shipyard before sunrise. The old Cap Horner was turned round on the Stör, a small tributary of the river Elbe to be able to pass into the big river bow first.

After a rain shower had passed the weather slowly cleared up, and with the break of dawn it got lighter. Hundreds of people stood on both river banks and directly in front of the open right bascule bridge, waiting for the PEKING.



The head tug WULF 5 slowly pulls the PEKING through the Stör surge barrier, braked at the stern by the tug TAUCHER O. WULF 3 ...

At 6:35 a.m., the Cuxhaven tug WULF 5 began to pass through the Stör surge barrage in Wewelsfleth. For the passage through the 22-meter-wide bascule bridge, there was just 3.80 m of „space“ left on each side to manoeuvre the PEKING through. The tug TAUCHER O. WULF 3 assisted at her stern. The yards of the PEKING had been braced hard to port for the manoeuvre.



... almost done.

At 6:40 a.m., the passage had been cleared without any damage. The spectators spontaneously gave a thunderous applause, accompanied by drawn-out signals from the ship's typhoons. The tugs continued the short stretch towards the estuary of the river Elbe.



In a few minutes this special tow turns into the river Elbe fairway.

Past the town Glückstadt, the PEKING passed the village of Kollmar with the two tugs up the river Elbe around 8:30 a.m. Even this early, numerous boats were accompanying the former cargo sailing ship, and many spectators had gathered on the piers and dykes.

After around 27 river kilometres since turning into the river Elbe, the tow was stopped for several hours in the Twielenfleth roads to wait for the next incoming tide.

On the river Elbe, the PEKING can be seen from afar, here from the marina near the village Kollmar.



During the day, the weather improved steadily to blue sky, a few clouds, and sunshine.

In this beautiful weather, a whole fleet of museum ships and small leisure boats sailed towards the PEKING from Hamburg to give her an appropriate welcome on Twielenfleth roads and accompany the old ship for the approximately 30 kilometres to Hamburg's Hansa Harbour on the Kleiner Grasbrook.

Only a few of these museum ships shall be named here, because the full list would be like the Who's Who of German museum ships: the steamship SCHAARHÖRN (1908), the steam icebreaker STETTIN (1933), the steam launch OTTO LAUFFER (1928), the port doctor's launch HAFENDOCKTER (1929), the lightship ELBE 3 (1888), the Finkenwerder sailing trawlers LANDRATH KÜSTER (1889) and PRESIDENT FREIHERR OF MALT-ZAHN (1928), the general cargo ship BLEICHEN (1958), the coaster MS GREUNDIEK (1950), the former fire-fighting boat REPSOLD (1941, today known as the barge of the unforgettable folk actor Jan Fedder alias Kiez (neighborhood) policeman Dirk Matthies in the Hamburg TV series 'Großstadtrevier').



Traditional ships and leisure boats circle the waiting PEKING in the Twielenfleth roads.



Generations meet: Cargo sailing ship meets container ship.

After the PEKING's yards had been braced square, the tug WULF 5 began to pull the four-masted barque into the Elbe fairway at around 3:25 p.m., with the stern tug acting as rudder. Less than half an hour later, the oncoming 333-meter-long container vessel CAP SAN NICOLAS of the Hamburg Süd company (Maersk Line) greeted the PEKING with the traditional ship's greeting: three long typhoon blasts, whereupon the fleet replied three times, followed by a short final signal from both parties.

Situated not far from the Hamburg city limits, the well-known "Willkomm-Höft" at the Neues Schulauer Fährhaus soon was reached, a facility that welcomes ships of more than 1,000 gross tonnage (GT) at the port of Hamburg or says goodbye to them, playing the flag state's national anthem. Here too, countless spectators stood on the bank.

The welcoming captain received the four-masted bark PEKING via external loudspeakers with the words: "After 88 years, we welcome PEKING to her home port. We are pleased that the Freie und Hansestadt Hamburg has again a 'Hamborger Veermaste'r as a floating landmark. The associ-



A large number of spectators followed the welcoming ceremony at the Welcome Point „Neues Schulauer Fährhaus“.

Soon the tug has reached Blankenese with the hill „Süllberg“.



ation "Freunde der Viermastbark PEKING" welcomes her from on board the MS HAMBURG, owned by the Abicht shipping company."

After passing the Hamburg city limits, the largest fire-fighting vessel in Europe, the BRANDDIREKTOR WEST-PHAL, took over the lead of the tow. With a pumping capacity of 120,000 litres of water per minute, the three water cannons creating huge fountains, up to 180 m wide and 110 m high.

The armada of escort ships and boats grew larger and larger, counting over 300 at the most recent estimate – a dimension that is otherwise only achieved in the ships' parades of the Hamburg Port Birthday festival. Even occasional gun salutes could be heard cracking.



The sun conjured up a rainbow on the fountains of the fire-fighting vessel.

We slowly went past Blankenese towards the Burchardkai container terminal. At the terminal in Altona, the cruise ship HANSEATIC INSPIRATION greeted the PEKING with her typhoon and all the accompanying ships answered. Again and again, the old steam whistles of the museum ships echoed through the harbour, reminding of times long past. In the meantime, some members of the hauling crew, probably from the riggers, had climbed the masts and were watching the arrival from lofty heights.

From Blankenese to the HafenCity, thousands of spectators greeted the PEKING on the banks, on the landing stages, on board of the famous sailing vessel RICKMER RICKMERS and of the 1960s' general cargo ship CAP SAN DIEGO, everybody trying to capture the historic moments with their cameras and smartphones.

Almost at the end of the tow, the well-known shanty „Ick heff mol en Hamborger Veermaster sehn ...“ rang out over the harbour from the loudspeakers of the Hamburg Landungsbrücken, things got really emotional and some people even might have shed a tear. The song is an adaptation of the English capstan shanty „On the Banks of Sacramento“.



The riggers let the famous Hamburg main church St. Michaelis - the Michel - work on them.



Probably the most emotional moment of the whole day - the PEKING passes the St. Pauli Landungsbrücken.

From the bridge deck of the CAP SAN DIEGO, the Michel-Tower-keeper and the St. Michaelis trombone choir greeted the PEKING with more sea shanties.

The PEKING reached the Elbphilharmonie at 6:13 p.m. In the mild evening light, the two tugs turned the PEKING by 180° and hauled the old Flying P-liner backwards into the Hansahafen. At around 7:00 p.m., the PEKING was firmly moored at her temporary berth on the Bremer Kai directly in front of the Hamburg Harbour Museum's shed 50A at the Australiastraße.

The owner of the PEKING, the Foundation Hamburg Historical Museums (Stiftung Historische Museen Hamburg, SHMH for short), will continue restoring the PEKING as a stationary museum ship. For example, the crew's quarters, the officers' and the Captain's cabins as well as



The tower trumpeter, who blows a chorale on his trumpet from the tower of the 'Michel' in all four directions in the morning at 10 a.m. and in the evening at 9 p.m., played sea shanties with the trombone choir.



Two Hamburg landmarks on one photo - the Elbphilharmonie Concert Hall and the four-masted barque PEKING.



The PEKING at her temporary berth alongside the Bremer Kai in front of the Hamburg Harbour Museum.

the Captain's saloon have to be furnished with wall panelling, berths and cupboards. Electrical lighting and up-to-date safety devices still have to be installed for the visitors. The tall ship will remain at this temporary berth until the German Harbour Museum on Kleiner Grasbrook is completed.

For later demonstration purposes in the use of the sail, a group of honorary sailmakers of the four-masted barque POMMERN (ex MNEME)

in Mariehamn on the Åland Islands is sewing a fore stay-sail and a lower topsail for the PEKING. However, the vessel will not go under sail anymore and, according to current plans, will not be towed to the river Elbe for special occasions, as the costs involved are too high.

However, it is planned to show visitors at a later date, for example, how the freight sailing ship was loaded and unloaded - after all, it is to become a living museum ship.

According to current plans, PEKING is to be opened to visitors for viewing in summer 2021.

The PEKING's return to Hamburg was made possible thanks to the commitment of politicians Jo-



Here a group of honorary sailmakers from the four-masted barque POMMERN ex MNEME in Mariehamn on the Åland Islands sews a lower topsail for the PEKING. Photo: Jan Grönstrand

hannes Kahrs (SPD) and Rüdiger Kruse (CDU), and, above all, of Mr. Reinhard Wolf, who has worked for her return for 20 years. Together with Joachim Kaiser (Head of PEKING Restoration Team), Reinhard Wolf founded the Hamburg Maritime Foundation, which looked after the ship until it was handed over to the SHMH. On November 8, 2013, Reinhard Wolf and lawyer Henning Schwarzkopf, together with five other people interested in the PEKING, founded the association "Freunde der Viermastbark PEKING e. V. „. Chaired by Mr. Mathias Kahl, the association's goals are researching the ship's history, among others focussing on her voyages from 1911 to 1932, providing guided tours and information about the ship, as well as supporting demonstrations of practical seaman's work on board and assisting with subsequent maintenance.

Interested persons who would like to support the association „Freunde der Viermastbark PEKING e. V.“ through honorary work, and / or as members, are always welcome. The required forms can be found under "The Association", "Downloads", on the association's website www.peking-freunde.de/en. Dietrich Peter Kleine, Collaborating Member C-034 of the Brotherhood of Captains of Cape Horn of Chile, German Section, Member 10072 of Freunde der Viermastbark PEKING e.V.; Text and photos Sept. 2020, photo POMMERN sailmakers by Jan Grönstrand.