

Our Visitor From Vienna

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One hundred years ago Sigmund Freud made his only visit to the United States. The centennial of this event seems a good time to recount the little-known fact that during his trip the father of psychoanalysis sailed up Narragansett Bay.

The basic facts about Freud's trip to the US are well known. G Stanley Hall, the president of Clark University in Worcester, and a psychologist, invited Freud to lecture and receive an honorary degree as part of the university's 20th anniversary celebration. Clark originally scheduled the celebration for June 1909, but Freud declined that invitation on the grounds that early summer was a busy time for his clinical practice and if he traveled then he would lose too much income. When Clark rescheduled the event for September and increased Freud's travel allowance, Freud accepted the invitation. He set sail for the US from Bremen on August 21, 1909, with two members of his inner circle, Sandor Ferenczi, a Hungarian psychoanalyst, and Carl Jung, the Swiss psychoanalyst with whom he would later experience a bitter break.

They arrived in New York City on August 29th and spent the next week as tourists—seeing the museums, walking up and down the avenues, visiting Coney Island and Chinatown. On September 4th Freud left for Worcester. Several days later, at Clark University, he gave the first of five daily lectures describing his theory of the mind. He spoke with little preparation, without notes and in his characteristic conversational style. At Hall's urging, when Freud returned to Vienna he wrote down these lectures from memory. They were translated into English and published in both English and German.

With one exception, Freud's biographers don't tell us how he got from New York City to Worcester. But Saul Rosenzweig, a psychologist who spent 50 years researching and writing his 475 page book about Freud's trip to America (*Freud, Jung and Hall The Kingmaker: The Historic Expedition to America 1909*), notes that on Saturday, September 4, 1909, Freud and his companions left New York "by night-boat to Fall River" and on Sunday "they traveled by rail via Boston to their destination, Worcester."

Had Rosenzweig not provided this information, we would have guessed that Freud made the journey in precisely this manner. If one needed to travel from New York City to Massachusetts in 1909, the Fall River Line was the way to go. You could take the train, but it took longer (all the bridges were not in place so passengers had to take ferries at several points). Most importantly, the Fall River Line's steamships, complete with valet service, lavish staterooms and sumptuous dining, offered comfort.

In 1909 the Fall River Line operated two steamships - the Princess and the Commonwealth. Every evening at 5:00 one left New York City and one Fall River. They arrived at their destinations 12 hours later and made the return trip later that day.

A quick check of the *Fall River News*, which listed the comings and goings of these ships, places Freud and his party, which now included in addition to Ferenczi and Jung, Abraham Brill, a New York City psychoanalyst, and Ernest Jones, a British psychoanalyst and Freud's biographer, on the Commonwealth.

After leaving its berth in New York City on the evening of Sept 4th the Commonwealth rounded the Battery, sailed up the East River, weathered Hell's Gate and then steamed through Long Island Sound. I imagine that at about the time the Commonwealth entered the Sound, Freud and his companions sat down for dinner. Ernest Jones would have reserved a table. Freud had suffered a bout of indigestion a few days earlier that he attributed to the richness of American food, so he would probably have done without the caviar and other delicacies offered by the Commonwealth. He probably ordered something simple,

perhaps roast beef, one of his favorites. A cigar, maybe a bit of discussion about Brill's dream the night before, and Freud was off to bed.

Around midnight, the Commonwealth left the relative calm of Long Island Sound and soon tr came up against the unpredictable and often treacherous seas off Point Judith. At 2:10 AM, it stopped at Newport—the only stop between New York and Fall River. I imagine that the change in the ship's motion awakened Freud. When I awaken in a strange hotel room it often takes me several seconds to realize where I am. Not Freud. I suspect that he immediately grasped the nature of his whereabouts, turned on the bedside light, wrote down the dream fragment he remembered, and, free of the unanalyzed anxieties that keep many of us awake, instantly returned to sleep.

After Newport, the Commonwealth sailed past Jamestown up the east passage of Narragansett Bay. It pleases me that Freud crossed the same waters that I sail every summer. I have long felt a professional connection—debt might be more accurate—toward Freud. That we traversed the same waters adds a bond of a more heart-felt sort.

As the sun rose, the Commonwealth enters Mount Hope Bay; the passengers are served coffee and donuts. I picture Freud at the Commonwealth's railing, with a cup of coffee in his hand. Jung, another early riser, is at his side.

"They are a simple people, these pioneers and cowboys," Freud says to Jung.

"And prudish," Jung offers, well aware of the master's thoughts on this subject.

Both men watch a lobster boat leave Bristol Harbor and disappear into the mist. "All the same," Freud continues, "there is beauty here, and magic."

Freud did not stay long in Fall River. He was due in Worcester later that day and he probably took the first available train to Boston. That would have meant the 6:40 AM, leaving the wharf less than two hours after the Commonwealth arrived.

It is not entirely surprising that Freud's trip up the Bay went completely unnoticed. Although he was 53 years old in 1909 and his work was known in professional circles, he was not yet a celebrity. That was all to change quite soon. In fact, the Clark lectures, a few days later, marked Freud's emergence as a figure of international renown.

Needless to say, Freud didn't get it all right. If women envy anything about men it's probably their power, not their anatomy. And much of how we feel and think and behave is molded at least as much by our genes as by our training - potty and otherwise. But even if only 1% of what he put forth was correct, Freud taught us more than anyone before or since about how the mind works. For that he stands with Newton and Darwin. But more than Newton and Darwin he belongs to us. At the height of his creative powers he sailed our waters, breathed our air, landed on our shore.

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The author and spouse/significant other have no financial interests to disclose.

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