

Reichsbahn Film Advertising Germany to American Tourists (1927)

Abstract

Germany's National Railway [Deutsche Reichsbahn-Gesellschaft] produced this short 1927 film to draw North American tourists to the historic towns, spa resorts, and scenic wonders of the Neckar River Valley, and it harnessed the talents of the gifted filmmaker Paul Wolff in order to do so. Wolff highlighted the old-world charm, and he bathed his subject matter—including the bustling city of Heidelberg—in the romantic glow of premodern rhythms, from horse-drawn wagons to a shepherd tending his flock. An early scene featuring costumed reenactors, for instance, announced that the Elector Friedrich of the Palatinate still greeted guests at his castle just as he had done for 300 years. The scene winkingly nodded to tourists' expectations of seeing castles and royalty, but, in the process, it erased Germany's 1918 establishment of a republic and abolition of noble titles. At the same time, the film also reassured travelers that they would find modern amenities along the route, especially the health resorts and spa hotels that dotted the landscape.

Record numbers of North Americans voyaged to Europe in the 1920s, buoyed by rising incomes and a strong economy. This film's picturesque appeal represented just one of the approaches that Germany took to lure those tourists, and other advertising materials from the same time took the opposite approach of showcasing cosmopolitan Berlin. The German National Railway, meanwhile, occupied a unique position compared to other parts of the national infrastructure in the Weimar Republic. As a central part the 1924 Dawes Plan that sought to better enable and regulate Germany's payment of reparations to the victorious Allies, the railway served as collateral, and creditors could also skim some of the profits. Foreign tourists who traveled by train, in other words, indirectly contributed to the relatively smooth functioning of the reparations regime in the late 1920s and to the balance sheets of some of their compatriot creditors. Wolff produced this film just as he had begun transitioning from film to an almost exclusive focus on print photography, the medium in which he established his most lasting artistic legacy.

Source

Source: *Von Heidelberg durch das Neckartal nach Rothenburg und Würzburg*, dir. Paul Wolff, Wolff-Film for Deutsche Reichsbahngesellschaft, 1927. Bundesarchiv Filmarchiv Filmwerk ID: 72964

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Recommended Citation: Reichsbahn Film Advertising Germany to American Tourists (1927), published in: German History in Documents and Images,

<https://germanhistorydocs.org/en/weimar-germany-1918-1933/ghdi:video-5231> [March 16, 2026].