



# Immigrants to icons

## Germans who changed American industry

A documentary series , 2010; 5 x 52'

The legendary Levi's jeans, Heinz tomato ketchup, Boeing planes, precious Steinway pianos and the legendary Waldorf-Astoria Hotel in New York.

### The Stories

Immigrants to Icons, is a fivepart limited series that dives deep into the stories of five German entrepreneurs who redefined the American economy and left a major imprint on American culture. Although their homeland is Germany, their stories are uniquely American. Each entrepreneur succeeded because their inventiveness, courage, perseverance and hard work enabled them to prove themselves in a strange new land, and allowed them to grow from immigrants to millionaires.

Immigrants to Icons, presents one of the most fascinating and exciting eras of German and American history. How and why did immigrants like Levi Strauss, Henry C. Steinway, William Boeing, John Jacob Astor and Henry Heinz succeed? And how did they become archetypal success stories that even now epitomize the success story that is America? The series visits the companies of Levi Strauss & Co., Steinway & Sons, Heinz Ketchup and Boeing. We'll see how each man took a novel and brilliant idea, established a company and gained fame, honor, and wealth. These five biographical hours are the definitive portraits of these entrepreneurial giants; businessmen who have their homeland in common and their place in history secured. They leave for various economic, social, political, and religious reasons – but all to find a better life in America. These are the stories of five immigrants who made it big in America.

### Style & Format

To further glimpse into the past, the series is punctuated with dramatic reenactments that illustrate key moments in each story. The recreations show pivotal points in the life of each pioneer. Used stylistically and sparingly, they create a visual identifier to the series, orienting the viewer to a fascinating time and place in history. Ultimately, the combination of solid documentary filmmaking with vivid historical recreation result in a program that is historically accurate, visually appealing and conceptually inspiring. Both the public and personal lives of these complex men come together in a compelling and comprehensive portrait that illuminates the promise that is America.

All stories are told through the voices of each icon's living descendants. Family members narrate the story of their ancestor, creating a personal connection with these larger-than-life figures. They take us on trips through modern-day America to sites that played major roles in each of our subjects' lives. The families and estates of all five entrepreneurs opened their doors to us and shared letters, photographs, diaries, and documents from the past that have never before been seen by the public. Guiding us through these intensely personal stories are authoritative historians, who provide context to the time period and business world that our protagonists moved through. We include primary sources, material from the most reputable archives and museums in Germany and the United States, as well as documents, photos, and letters from company and private archives.

### Episode 1

William Edward Boeing - The dream of flying

One immediately associates the name Boeing with the dynamic world of aviation, enormous aircraft, global air traffic, as well as success and economic power. Yet hardly anyone realises that the mighty "global player" was once a family-owned business, only very few people know that the family originally came from Germany.

The film "William Edward Boeing – The dream of flying" visits original sites where you can still feel the Boeing story to this very day. It delves into the archives and finds surprising new information about the family history, and includes interviews with the son of the company founder William Boeing.

Detailed re-enactments, filmed in the USA with the help of a German-American team, revisit the days long gone by days of the late 19th and early 20th century in touching scenes. The result is an exciting family portrait, the gripping story of an immigrant family and an astounding documentary about an entrepreneur – the history of the Boeings and the Böings whose family ties span the Atlantic.

### Episode 2

Henry Steinway – A legend is born

Pianists have always regarded the concert grands of Steinway & Sons as the best in the world, which is why these instruments stand in 98 per cent of all concert halls across the globe. They are still produced mainly by hand in Steinway's factories in New York and Hamburg and comprise more than 12,000 individual parts.

The scenic documentary "Henry Steinway – A legend is born" by Christoph Weinert tells the moving story of Heinrich Engelhardt Steinweg, who emigrated to America from the German town Seesen in the Harz in the mid-19th century and advanced in his new home town New York to become the most famous piano maker of all times.

### Episode 3

John Jacob Astor - America's richest man

"Oh, he was a tight-fisted hand at the grindstone was Ebenezer Scrooge. A squeezing, grasping, clutching, covetous old sinner." This is the man every child thinks of when it hears the name Ebenezer Scrooge, the main character in Charles Dickens' "A Christmas Carol". Far less well-known is the real-life person the character is based on: John Jacob Astor. The fact that he did not only make history for being a miser can be seen in the film "John Jacob Astor – America's richest man".

The film "John Jacob Astor – America's richest man" is a breathtaking trip to a world of danger and adventure, full of new ideas and opportunities. It is a film about one of the most famous names in the world, whose namegiver has almost been completely forgotten.

### Episode 4

Henry John Heinz – A passion for ketchup

From hobby gardener to millionaire: Henry John Heinz, the son of German immigrants, becomes not only one of the most successful food producers with his mother's recipes, but also one of the best salesmen in the world.

With everyday products like gherkins, sauerkraut and his famous ketchup, he has changed the eating habits of

America and the world. "Henry John Heinz – A passion for ketchup" is the portrait of an unusual man of many talents, a man who goes through many trials and tribulations, and who founds a company that now counts as one of the big brands in the world

### Episode 5

Levi Strauss - A life for jeans

There is hardly a place in the world where nobody is wearing jeans. There are countless myths and legends that have developed around the invention of blue jeans. The film takes the audience on a trip back to the past. It explores the exciting and thrilling days of Lola Montez and Buffalo Bill, and reconstructs young Löb Strauss's arduous journey from Buttenheim via Bremerhaven to New York and San Francisco.

With re-enacted scenes, archive material and interviews with historians and descendants of Levi Strauss, the film shows the fascinating story of the German-Jewish immigrant struggling to survive in the 19th century. It sheds light on the fast ascent of the haberdashery Levi Strauss, who, with the invention of blue jeans, became a millionaire and created a cult object of the "American way of life" with his Levi's.

Levi Strauss & Co. design for riveted pants soon becomes so popular that they can barely keep up with orders – and Levi's working pants, the 501 jeans, become an American legend. His once small company grows to one of the largest and most legendary fashion labels in the world.

### Production Highlights

Immigrants to Icons is a production of Gebrueder Beetz Filmproduktion (USA/Germany).

- Broadcast partners: ARD (NDR), ARTE
- Additional funding by: Filmförderung HSH and Nordmedia.
- International Distribution: German United

Director + Script **Ira Beetz, Achim Scheunert, Christoph Weinert, Kai Christiansen**  
 Camera **Jörg Hammermeister, Hans Jakobi, Reiner Bauer, Jan Kerhart and André Dekker**  
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 Music **Nils Kacirek**  
 Sound-Mix **Pierre Brandt**  
 Graphic **Stefan Matlik**  
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 Commissioning Editor **Ulrike Dotzer (NDR, arte)**  
 A production of **gebrueder beetz filmproduktion**  
 On behalf of **NDR/arte**

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