In September 1744, the saddler Philipp Schütz, a native of Neckarbischofsheim in the Kraichgau who had immigrated to Pennsylvania in 1732 and taken up residence in the town of Lancaster, placed advertisements in two Pennsylvania newspapers, informing readers that his wife had run away with one Jacob Frederick Kurtz. By mid-century Kurtz, who meanwhile called himself ‘Curteus’, had established himself as a merchant in Lancaster – he purchased a house and half lot in the town for £230 in January 1751 – and engaged in the business of transporting German migrants to Pennsylvania. In the early 1750s, at least two immigrant ships carrying 930 passengers were consigned to him. In May 1751 Curteus signed a contract with John Stedman and Hope & Company of Rotterdam that historian Marianne Wokeck has characterised as a “most ambitious and elaborate arrangement”. In the partnership agreement that extended from 1752 to 1754, “the Rotterdam merchants agreed with Curteus that he would procure emigrants – in return for a share of 400 passengers for his own ships, one-eighth of the profits, and one-third of the commission in Philadelphia – while Stedman and Isaac Hope would obtain and pay for ‘the needful Dutch and Prussian passes for the passengers.’” Wokeck’s assumption that this partnership “was short-lived and not very
successful”⁴ is borne out by deeds recorded in Lancaster in the mid-1750s, which indicate that Curteus had accumulated considerable debts by then. In December 1753 he sold a town house to the merchant Ludwig Stein, and two and a half years later, in May 1756, he mortgaged a house and various merchandise to the Jewish trader Joseph Simon for the sum of £650.⁵ Afterwards he disappears from the records.

The case of Jacob Friedrich Curteus illustrates the ambivalent reputation of agents in the German immigrant trade to British North America. On the one hand, he did business with some of the biggest merchants involved in the transatlantic passenger trade; on the other hand, his affair with the wife of a German immigrant indicates that he was a man of questionable character. Moreover, he entered the trade for only a brief period when German migration to Pennsylvania was at its peak and seems to have lacked the capital for a more sustained involvement.

Historians have long recognised that the migration of about 111,000 German-speakers to British North America between 1683 and 1775⁶ was dependent on the existence of a network of merchants and shippers in European and North American ports who provided the necessary freight capacities, shipping and financial services. In the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, Quakers such as the Rotterdam-based merchant Benjamin Furly and Mennonites such as the merchant Jacob Telner from Amsterdam provided essential information, financial aid and logistical support to persecuted co-religionists,⁷ and from the 1720s to the 1770s a small group of firms based in London, Rotterdam and Philadelphia

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⁴ Wokeck, *Trade in Strangers*, 84n.
⁵ Mayhill, *Deed Abstracts*, 44 (D132), 63 (E116); Häberlein, *The Practice of Pluralism*, 169.
⁶ This figure has been calculated by Wokeck, *Trade in Strangers*, 40–46. Other studies estimate the number of German migrants to colonial America between 84,500 and 130,000. For a summary of these estimates, see Hermann Wellenreuther, *Ausbildung und Neubildung. Die Geschichte Nordamerikas vom Ausgang des 17. Jahrhunderts bis zum Ausbruch der Amerikanischen Revolution 1775* (Hamburg: LIT, 2001): 99f.