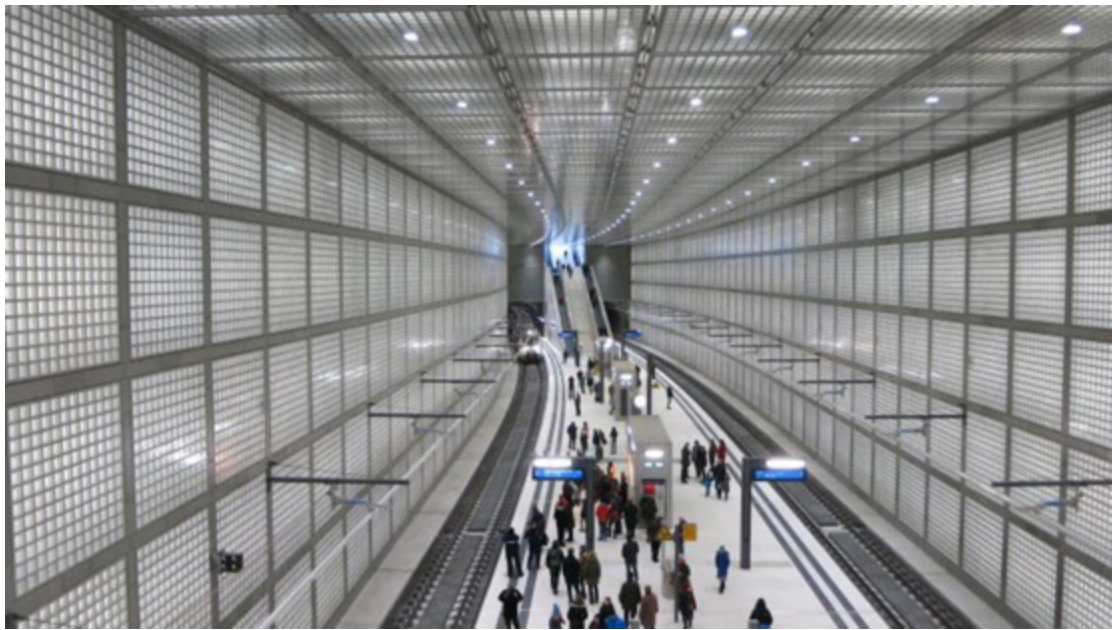




Richard Deiss

Palace of a thousand winds and
the Gooseberry station

Short stories about 222 plus 2
stations in Germany



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Foreword

Ich verstehe nur Bahnhof (I understand only train station) was a saying used by war-weary soldiers in World War I with which they wanted to express that they only wanted to go home. Everyone thinks they know what a train station is, but there are internal stipulations. In DB (German Railways) terminology, a station must have at least one switch in order to be considered as such. Everything else is just a stop. The term "train station" means the entire facility, whereas the building with ticket sales is referred to as the station building. The population mostly only calls this station. Additionally, the location of the station building in relation to the tracks allows a terminal station to distinguish from a station with through traffic. At a tower station, the tracks are on two levels (one above the other); at an island station, the building is between the tracks. Originally, the train and traffic vocabulary in Germany was strongly French, since French was an important international and educational language until the 19th century. However, with the emergence of nationalism at the end of the 19th century, German-sounding expressions were sought. A German language association was even formed, which published a Germanization dictionary and developed alternatives for words such as Bahnsteig (railway platform) and Fahrkarte (ticket) for (the pseudo-French) *perron* and *billet*. Switzerland was less affected by this development, where the French variants are still used frequently.

Railway stations were once more important for the economic development of a city than they are today because the railway was the only efficient long-distance method of travel. However, the amount of traffic was far less than today. Monumental train stations such as Lehrter

and Anhalter Bahnhof in Berlin had only a few tracks, a low train frequency, and far fewer travelers than today's large stations. Prior to the war, the Anhalter Bahnhof had about 10,000 travelers a day, whereas German metropolitan train stations today have around 100,000 travelers a day. Because the long-distance transport offer has become significantly denser on the main routes, there is also high-frequency rail transport in large cities. Today there is simply a lot more traveling and commuting than in the past, and although the relative importance of trains due to roads and air traffic has decreased, more trains are being used than ever before.

The Werkbund architect Karl-Ernst Osthaus said, "there was a time when one could speak of station poetry." The fascination of the steam locomotive era, to which many impressive station buildings were oriented, has passed, but the poetry of the train stations can still be deduced in many historical stations.

I hope to entertain with the little stories and anecdotes that have been compiled in this booklet and help to round off existing knowledge about the railway. The book is part of a five-volume series with anecdotes, interesting stories, and facts about a total of 1001 train stations worldwide (titles of the other volumes: see the last page). Compared to the last edition, newly added stations are marked with a diamond ❖

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Berlin, November 2020
Richard Deiss

1. Berlin

1.1 Mainline and regional stations

Berlin's first train station

When the railway was to be introduced in Prussia, the responsible government council tried to warm King Frederick William III up to the project of a railway connection Berlin-Potsdam. They argued, "If your Majesty left Charlottenburg at 8 o'clock, your Majesty would reach Potsdam by 12 o'clock. And now, your Majesty, imagine: If in the future, your Majesty boarded the train at eight o'clock, your Majesty would be in Potsdam by nine o'clock." The king nodded, but asked: "And what am I supposed to do in Potsdam at nine o'clock?" Later his son Frederick William IV said about the railway, "This vehicle that now rolls through the world, no human arm can stop it anymore." In 1838, the first Prussian railway line was opened from Potsdam to Berlin. The terminus in front of the Potsdamer Tor and the excise (customs) wall was Berlin's first railway station. It had one track and a side platform.

Berlin Potsdamer Platz

In 1872, the Potsdam railway station was opened not far from the first Berlin railway station. Soon state guests such as Emperor Franz Josef of Austria-Hungary were received here. From the thirties onwards, electric 'banker trains' travelled from here to the noble districts in the west. During the war, the station was badly damaged and finally demolished in 1958-1960. At that time, the newspaper *Welt der Arbeit* wrote: "The red brick building was not exactly a beautiful architectural monument. Nevertheless, every Berliner feels a sense of melancholy when a stone witness

disappears from the face of the earth after being torn down.” After the turn of the millennium, the underground station at Potsdamer Platz, which for a long time was only served by S-Bahn trains, finally became a regional transport station again. Across from its entrance is the railway tower of the DB (*Deutsche Bahn*, German Railways) head office.

Anhalter Bahnhof - the gate to the far away distance

The Anhalter Bahnhof, once called *the mother cave of the railway* by Walter Benjamin and popularly known as *the gateway to the distance*, was badly damaged in the war and finally demolished in the 1960s. However, the portal proved to be stubborn and resisted several attempts to demolish it. So finally, the people accepted this and left the remains of the portal as a monument.

The many Lehrter railway stations

In May 2006, Berlin's central railway station (Hauptbahnhof), which bears the additional name Lehrter Bahnhof, was opened. Originally it should have been called Lehrter Bahnhof, then Haupt-bahnhof-Lehrter Bahnhof. Yet, the term Hauptbahnhof became more common by the railway company. This is actually not a bad idea at all because many 'Lehrter Bahnhof' stations exist currently or have previously existed. In 1871, the Lehrter Bahnhof was opened on the Spree. It was located a little away from the centre and densely built-up areas but had a grandiose, palatial architecture in the style of Italian High Renaissance. Badly damaged in the Second World War, Lehrter Bahnhof was blown up in 1959. Not far from there, on the S-Bahn (suburban train) line, was Lehrter Stadtbahnhof, which had to make way for the new central station. Finally, there is another station with this name in the town of Lehrte in Lower Saxony. Once a small village, Lehrte became a railway town at the intersection of the railway lines Hannover-Braunschweig and Hildesheim-Celle.

Berlin´s crumbling station

Berlin is the capital of nicknames for buildings. In no other city are there so many popular nicknames. Pregnant Oyster, Golden Else, and Erich's Lamp Shop are examples. However, in relation to the new Berlin Central Station, no nickname has yet become established. In the press, for example, it has been called *Glaspalast mit Wüste* (Glass Palace with Desert) or also *Pannenbahnhof* (or *Bröckelbahnhof*, meaning crumbling station), the latter not without reason.

After many construction delays, the railway decided to shorten the platform roof in order to achieve completion in 2006, the year Berlin would host the World Cup final. A false ceiling was also installed above the tunnel platforms, which affects the planned spatial effect. These changes led to a legal dispute between Deutsche Bahn and the architect Meinhard von Gerkan. Even during the opening, some things went wrong: the station did not react to the opening button, and the inauguration party in May 2006 was marred by a knife attack. In January 2007, on the other hand, two steel beams crashed after hurricane Kyrill. Since then, the railway company has been planning to close the station during strong winds. The station also has an underground station, but so far only a short section of the corresponding underground line has been opened.

In May 2007, the then railway boss Mehdorn had to reap another mockery, this time for his taste in art. A metal horse sculpture, *Rolling Horse* (now given nicknames like Mehdorn's horse), was unveiled at the station, and critics soon found out that this horse was essentially a replica of a horse sculpture (*S-printing horse*) by the same artist Goertz, which sat opposite Heidelberg Central Station. Mehdorn had commissioned this when he was still head of the Heidelberger Druckmaschinen (Printing Press) company.



Berlin Hbf

Berlin-Ostbahnhof and the station mission

The Berlin Ostbahnhof has already had many names. In 1842, it was opened as Frankfurt station; at that time, it was still a terminus station. Later, it was also called Lower Silesian-railway station, and finally, Silesian railway station. After World War II, after the recognition of the Oder-Neisse border by the GDR, this name was no longer appropriate,

and it was simply called Ostbahnhof (East train station). For the 750th anniversary celebration of Berlin in 1987, it was rebuilt in a prestigious manner and renamed to Hauptbahnhof. In 1998, it became Ostbahnhof again, because a new central station was planned in a different location using the so-called Pilz (mushroom) concept. One thing, however, lasted longer than the station name: Germany's first station mission (Bahnhofsmission), a social facility for the care of travellers and a contact point for travellers with all kinds of problems, was founded in 1907 in Berlin's Ostbahnhof, and it still exists today.

Berlin Zoological Garden

Berlin's Bahnhof Zoo was upgraded during the division of the city into a long-distance station, a function it lost again, however, with the opening of the new central station in May 2006. In the 1970s, the station, or rather the north entrance, was also a meeting place for the Berlin drug scene. In 1978, it achieved literary fame - it appeared in the title of Christiane F(elscherinow)'s autobiographical book *Wir Kinder vom Bahnhof Zoo (We the Children of Zoo Station)*. The north entrance and other dirty corners gave the station the nickname "Urological Garden."

The hotel station Estrel

With 1125 rooms, Estrel in Berlin-Neukölln is the largest hotel in Germany. Surprisingly, it does not belong to a chain. Instead, it was opened by the building contractor and namesake Ekkehard Streletzki in 1994. The Sonnenallee S-Bahn station is only a two minutes-walk from the hotel. However, you can reach the hotel even more directly by train. Special trains stop at the hotel's own Estrel station, and from here, they go on excursions to the surrounding area. However, this station is, from a railway point of view, only circumstantially reachable through hairpin bends. The hotel also has its own landing stage for boats.

1.2 Berlin S-Bahn stations

Ostkreuz-Rostkreuz

Berlin's important Ostkreuz (East cross) S-Bahn junction was long considered so structurally dilapidated that the Berliners called it Rostkreuz (rust-cross) and thought it was only held together by rust and advertising posters. Escalators and elevators were long sought in vain here. A renovation had been planned for a long time but was repeatedly postponed. In the meantime, however, renovation work has begun and is to be completed by 2020. However, railway connoisseurs looked forward to the refurbishment with mixed feelings since Ostkreuz was the last Berlin S-Bahn station until 2008, where the direction indicators and station signs were from GDR times, and the station was also adorned with old cast-iron columns and lamps.

Siemensstadt Fürstenbrunn

In the 1920s, Siemens had large plants in Fürstenbrunn, then still a western suburb of Berlin. In order to improve the plant's transport connections, Siemens had a disused railway line of the Lehrter Eisenbahn reactivated. The station at the plant was called Fürstenbrunn until 1925. However, Fürstenbrunn was also the name of a well-known mineral spring, and the corresponding mineral water was exported as far as the USA. When faced with the extensive factory at the Fürstenbrunn station, an American tourist is said to have exclaimed, "I didn't know that the seltzer factory was so big." According to Karl H.P. Bienek (see his website "die Siemensstadt"), the renaming to "Siemensstadt-Fürstenbrunn" is said to have been initiated after that.

Storkower Straße - the long misery (langes Elend)

Berlin's central cattle and slaughterhouse was once located at the Storkower Strasse S-Bahn station in Berlin-Lichtenberg. A 420 m long pedestrian bridge was built in 1937 to cross the area. In 1976-77, it was extended to 505 m to the S-Bahn station Storkower Straße and was thus Europe's longest pedestrian bridge. Its nicknames, of which Langes Elend (Long Misery), Angströhre (Tube of Fear), Rue de Galopp (Galop Road), however, show that this was not a pleasant crossing. In 2002, a 300 m long middle section was demolished, but also a 45 m long section was renovated to become the S-Bahn station. In 2006, a remaining section on Eldaer Straße also fell victim to the wrecking ball. Today you can reach the S-Bahn station and the other side of the tracks over the rest of the bridge, but you cannot cross the closed down cattle market anymore. The former Langer Jammer/ling misery now ends abruptly.



S-Bahnhof Storkower Straße: verkürzter Überweg

Wollankstraße and the escape tunnel

When the Berlin Wall still existed, the Wollankstraße S-Bahn station was a special feature. It was located in the eastern part of the city (in Pankow) but was part of the West Berlin S-Bahn network. While it had an exit (which was on the borderline) to the western part of the city, there was no access from the east. The Wall ran directly east of the station. From the station, after the demolition of residential buildings, one could see the death strip.

Surprisingly, in 1962, the platform surface lowered. Following this, the GDR border guards discovered an escape tunnel that had been dug from the west through the S-Bahn viaduct.

In GDR times, the S-Bahn in East Berlin had a striking red colour scheme with brown window bands. Erich Honecker, General Secretary of the East German Socialist Party, is said to have been so taken with this colour scheme on a visit to a trade fair that he ordered it for the entire S-Bahn fleet. Later this colour helped the S-Bahn cars to get the nickname "Coladose" (Coke can), which was probably not appreciated by the socialist government.

S-Bahn station Savignyplatz and the bookshop

One of the most beautiful German bookstores, Bücherbogen is located under the railway viaduct at Savignyplatz S-Bahn station in Charlottenburg. As you browse through these vaults, you can hear the thunder of the trains above you.

Berlin Lichterfelde East and the first electric train

In the pedestrian tunnel of the Lichterfelde Ost S-Bahn and regional train station, an information board indicates that the world's first electric train, a tram built by Siemens, departed from here in May 1881. It ran the route from the station to the Lichterfelde Cadet School.

2. Brandenburg

Königs Wusterhausen and Amanullah

Amanullah Khan (1892-1960) was Emir from 1919-1926 and King of Afghanistan from 1926-1929. In the course of his modernization efforts, he maintained particularly good relations with Germany. In the summer of 1928, a trip to Europe also took him to Berlin. There, he was given the opportunity to drive an A2 type underground train—which was modern at the time - himself. This type of design was nicknamed the Amanullah train.

The king also visited the surrounding area of Berlin, for example, a radio station in Nauen. In Königs Wusterhausen (König is king in German), however, the street sweeper Erich Lange stood for hours in his oak-leaved gala uniform at the station in vain. Colleagues had allowed themselves a joke and made him believe that King Amanullah would arrive here at the station. Erich Lange got the nickname Amanullah through this prank.

Cottbus' “Bayerischer Bahnhof”

The railway station of Cottbus (unofficially, but not officially called Central Train Station) was nicknamed “Bayerischer Bahnhof” (Bavarian railway station) in GDR times because of the blue and white façade design at that time. Curiously, the station also has a platform that is not accessible via the central platform tunnel.

Dannenwalde and the barefoot path

The village of Dannenwalde in the district of Prignitz fought for a long time to preserve its railway station. In 1997, an association was founded to make the station more