Under the Empire

1870–1918

When the idea of founding Deutsche Bank became reality in 1870, banking was in the throes of radical change: industrialisation meant that industry's financing needs were growing and the highly traditional banking sector was going to have to move with the times.

Adelbert Delbrück

In Berlin, a number of private bankers were open to new ideas. Their leading lights were Adelbert Delbrück and Ludwig Bamberger, both regarded as the "true founders" of Deutsche Bank. The bank's statute was adopted on January 22, 1870, and a little under two months later, on March 10, 1870, the Prussian government granted it a banking license. This was the last license issued to a joint-stock bank in Prussia. The license requirement was abolished that same year.

The statute placed great emphasis on foreign business: "The object of the company is to transact banking business of all kinds, in particular to promote and facilitate trade relations between Germany, other European countries and overseas markets." The direct aim was to challenge the hegemony of British banks, which continued to dominate the financing of German foreign trade. From the outset, international business was built up steadily. Between 1871 and 1873 Deutsche Bank opened five branches: in Bremen, Shanghai, Yokohama, Hamburg and London.

The founders, all of them bankers, showed vision in choosing the name Deutsche Bank even before Germany had been established as a nation-state. However, little did they suspect that they were creating tough competition for themselves. In the long run, financing foreign trade was not viable on its own, so the newly-founded bank was soon on the lookout for other areas of business.

First share certificate of Deutsche Bank

In the very year of its foundation, Deutsche Bank began to accept deposits in cash. Nowadays that sounds self-evident, but for the German banking world it was little short of revolutionary. The bank needed a solid base and

1870
Deutsche Bank is founded in Berlin

1871–72
First domestic branches in Bremen and Hamburg

First foreign branches in Shanghai and Yokohama in 1872

1873
Opening of the London branch, Deutsche Bank's most important foreign branch until its closure on the beginning of the First World War in 1914

1876
Acquisition of Berliner Bank-Verein and Deutsche Union-Bank

1883
Participation in Northern Pacific Railroad Company in the US

1886
Foundation of Deutsche Ueberseeische Bank

Opening of the Frankfurt branch

1887
Participation in the founding of AEG (electrical engineering industry)

1888
The Turkish government grants a Deutsche Bank-led consortium the first concession to build and run the Anatolian Railway, linking Istanbul and Ankara