

Can you help?

We are looking for anyone who can offer information about this family's history – Who were David's parents?

David Filby (1810 – 1879) Hamburg, Germany

“David Filby, optic and mechanic, nautical chart storage”

David Filby, the son of an inn keeper, was born 1810 in Husum, on the west coast of Schleswig-Holstein in North Germany. In 1820 the family moved to Hamburg which was a major sea port. *We are still researching David Filby's ancestors and descendants (if any) and welcome further information.*

At the age of twenty, in 1830, he began a four year apprenticeship as a mechanic in the workshop of Heinrich Johann Kosbu, an instrument maker for Physics. After completing his apprenticeship he traded in nautical literature, charts and sextants imported from England, and founded his own Company in 1837, aged twenty-seven. For legal reasons his Company had to be registered and the owner had to be a citizen of Hamburg, which was a separate state. However, David Filby did not achieve citizenship until 1840 having then operated his Company illegally for the three preceding years.

The Filby shop was at erste Vorsetzen, 28, directly on the Rummelhaffen where large sailing ships blocked the views over the Elbe. In his shop he stocked charts, nautical literature, and increasingly nautical instruments, which he first imported from Britain, then known as the best instruments worldwide. As was the practice, David Filby had the instruments he sold marked with the name of his firm “D. Filby, Hamburg.” He soon set up a repair workshop for nautical instruments which grew in the course of the next few years into an independent factory for the production of nautical instruments, mainly sextants. His company checked and certified sextants, barometers and compasses aboard ships in North Germany and also hand-built these instruments one by one.

For the next twenty-five years the company devoted itself to serving the needs of sea farers by providing nautical instruments of the highest quality, and their sextants were known throughout the maritime industry to be some of the best.

These efforts soon brought him success and public recognition as a respected citizen of Hamburg and in 1859 he became a Member of Parliament, also holding other honorary posts.

It is assumed that he finished work for temporal reasons at the age of fifty-two when he sold his Company to Carl Christian Plath in 1862. This new company was named “C. Plath, D. Filby's Successor” indicating the high esteem he held of Filby's business and his intention to maintain the same tradition of importing, making and selling navigational instruments. However, due to a clerical error in filing the notice of sale to C. Plath, the fact that David Filby operated his Company illegally for the first three years was uncovered. He

was brought before the Commercial Court and fined fifteen marks, which caused him great embarrassment as a delegate to the city parliament.

After the sale, David Filby devoted himself to numerous honorary offices until his death in 1879. Both “The Filby Foundation for the Relief of Poor and Needy Seamen and Seamen’s widows in Hamburg” and “The Filby Foundation Prize for the School of Navigation” were established in 1894 and operated until 1923.

Plath broadened the base of the former Filby business and in 1865 purchased a circular dividing machine for engraving the graduations on the arcs of the sextants he was producing. He was soon manufacturing a broad line of nautical instruments, including compasses of all sorts, his newly patented lightweight compass card, patent logs, sextants and octants. In 1889, at the Hamburg Crafts and Industry Exhibition, Plath received high praise and a Gold Medal for excellent precision work and the best made instruments in Hamburg.

In 1882 Plath sold the nautical literature and charts department to Eckardt & Messtorf, a bookshop which possibly still exists today.

C. Plath ceased sextant production in 2002 after 137 years.

*If you have any information on the ancestors or descendants of this family please use the [Contact page](#) to get in touch. Many thanks in anticipation.
(Marion Filby researcher)*