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Immigration

### **Ellis Island**

Did you know that twelve million immigrants were processed at Ellis Island? Most of us probably have an ancestor who was processed there when they came to America. Do you know that more new comers were processed here than anywhere else in the world!? It was opened in 1892 and padlocked in 1954. Ellis Island is positioned in New York Harbor between New York and New Jersey and most of the foreigners who were processed there came from Europe. Ellis Island was the most notorious immigration gateway to America. This is where people were screened, had their names changed, and some were rejected before they were scattered across America.

Ellis Island has gone through many different functions but it is best known for when it was an immigration station. In revolutionary times, it was owned by Samuel Ellis and used as a Fishermen's Tavern. Later in 1808, New York bought it from Samuel Ellis. It didn't really have a purpose until the Civil War when it was used as a military base.

A lot more recently, it opened officially as an immigration station on January 1, 1892, to replace the one in Castle Garden, that had been used since 1855. Five years later, in 1897, there was a fire. Thankfully nobody died but all the immigration station records from Castle Garden were destroyed. Three years after that, a new facility was built that was fireproof. Following that, more and more immigrants came to America, so the people in charge of Ellis Island made two more islands with landfill to expand Ellis Island. It has now grown from an original size of three acres to twenty seven. After that Ellis Island became less important. During World War I,

United States of America immigration slowed down dramatically. After that, the Quota Act of 1921 limited the numbers of immigrants allowed to enter America. Later, after twelve million documented aliens passed through, it closed on November 12, 1954. Next, President Johnson gave it to the NYC Parks Department after the Coast Guard used it for storage for many years. New York City turned Ellis Island into a museum in 1990 and is visited by tourists as well as citizens of New York City.

When Ellis Island was an immigration station the immigrants who went through it faced many hardships. Immigrants who arrived at Ellis Island bravely faced the many hardships of starting a new life in a different country after leaving their country for political, environmental, and economic reasons. After traveling on ships that were crowded and dirty, immigrants finally reached Ellis Island. Once people arrived there, the most depressing thing in their life was the concern of the possibility of not getting into the United States.

Getting permission to enter the United States was not always easy. When immigrants entered Ellis Island, they went to the Great Hall. It wasn't the best part of the journey but it was not the worst either. People say it was like Tower of Babel. The hall was not just crowded but extremely crowded and English was not known by most who entered it. The legal inspection happened inside the great hall the inspectors asked twenty nine questions as listed What is your name? How old are you? Are you male or female? Are you married or single? What is your occupation? Are you able to read and write? What country are you from? What is your race? What is the name and address of a relative from your native country? What is your final destination in America? Who paid for your passage? How much money do you have with you? Have you been to America before? Are you meeting a relative here in America? Who? Have you been in a prison, almshouse, or institution for care of the insane? Are you a polygamist? Are

you an anarchist? Are you coming to America for a job? Where will you work? What is the condition of your health? Are you deformed or crippled? How tall are you? What color are your eyes/hair? Do you have any identifying marks? Where were you born? Who was the first President of America? What are the colors of our flag? How many stripes are on our flag? How many stars? What is the 4th of July? What is the Constitution? What are the three branches in our government? Which President freed the slaves? Can you name the 13 original Colonies? Who signs bills into law? Who is the current President of the United States? What is America's national anthem called? If they answered a question wrong they would be detained which I will get to later. If the inspectors could not understand the surnames or first names of immigrants, they would abbreviate or change the spelling of them. During the medical exam people were looked at, and the inspectors would write symbols if they were sick so the hospital could treat them correctly. Some examples of the markings were X which meant possible mental problems, B for back issues, E for eye problems, P for physical or lung issues, SC for scalp problems, L for lameness, CTB for conjunctivitis (A.K.A pinkeye) that was main reasons immigrants were sent back. If you got one of these marks you'd be detained, and if you had one of those mark It was most depressing. A detainee is a person who is restricted to enter the United States for medical or other reasons. Often a detainee had a disability or was sick. If you were detained you would sleep on a tiny cot but most likely they'd be sent back on the next ship back to their country. If a person were to pass all the tests, they were guaranteed to get into Manhattan.

After all those inspections, the lucky immigrants finally got to go in New York City. They went into America passed by the last stop, the Kissing Post which was not a test. The place where they would be reunited with family members, who might have gone through before them to test it out and get some money. Many immigrant families came few at a time because the

cost of the trip was so expensive. Often the male members of the family came first to earn money.

The immigrants went to all sorts of places in New York City after Ellis Island but a lot of them went to the Lower East Side. To be more specific, the tenements. The tenements were cramped and old apartment buildings with miserable conditions and where a lot of people were crammed into one room and often would get sick. They had to live in these horrible places all because these were the only places many could afford.

A lot of people traveled to other states across the country to where there were already immigrants from their own country so they could get jobs and be reunited with friends and relatives already in the US. For example, the Germans often went to Pennsylvania, North Dakota and Wisconsin because of the farming land. The Polish often went to Chicago because of all of the jobs. A lot of Irish immigrants went to Boston and New England because a lot of Irish already were there and it was easier to find work. The Greeks often went to Utah and New England because of the the mining jobs. They also went California to help build the railroad and to Chicago, Massachusetts New York to build or open restaurants. The cultural influences of the German, Polish, Irish, and Greek immigrants can still be seen when visiting these areas.

After sailing across the sea, immigrants saw Ellis Island, the place where they got the chills, and the satisfaction of being free. Ellis Island was a happy place for some, and a scary place for others. Not everyone who arrived was allowed in and people were sent back due to medical problems. Ellis Island was also a gateway to freedom, success, and safety for many immigrants. Today Ellis Island is a museum where many people go to see where their ancestors arrived and some changed their names. This is a place of both individual family histories and a national history of America.