[Lesson 529]

[1110L]

[645 words]

Crossing into History

Throughout history, immigrants have moved from one place to another for a number of reasons—to make a better life, to reunite with family, to seek political asylum, to escape war or natural disasters. During the Industrial Revolution of the 1800s, a new mode of transportation, steamships, transformed immigration. Mass overseas travel became a reality; new industry and the continued settlement of the United States created jobs and chances for land ownership. The young country symbolized opportunity for millions of foreigners. Heralded as a promised land, the United States became home to those wishing for a new beginning. At one important immigration port—Ellis Island—peak immigration occurred between 1900-1914.

From 1892 to 1954, Ellis Island, an immigration station in Hudson Bay, near New York City, was the gateway for millions of European immigrants. Traveling by steamship from their native land, they could choose from three types of accommodations: first class, second class, or steerage. The conditions in steerage were, at best, uncomfortable, and deplorable in most cases. Imagine sailing for several days, tightly packed into the lower area of the ship—meaning you felt the ocean's waves—and had inadequate toilet and bathing areas. Upon arriving in Ellis Island, physically and emotionally exhausted, only steerage passengers were required to be processed at Ellis Island. All first-and second-class passengers were inspected aboard the ship, and immediately transferred to New York City. Officials thought that if steerage passengers could not afford the better tickets, then they might pose a health risk.

An immigrant's experience in Ellis Island was **chaotic** because new arrivals came from different countries, spoke different languages (more than 30), and practiced different religions. They were expected to surrender their luggage and enter an area known as the Registry Room, which was almost as big as a football field. Doctors inspected each person for disease. Those who were deemed unhealthy went to the island's hospital; about 10 percent were required to make the **arduous** return journey to their home country. This applied to adults as well as children; imagine *immediately* returning to Europe, with all of the discomforts of the initial voyage, all over again!

Once immigrants passed their physical tests, each one was required to speak with an inspector, often aided by an interpreter. In the Great Hall, aisles separated immigrants based on their intended final arrival points in the U.S. Their last stops inside the Great Hall might be to the post office, a window to exchange money from their home country for American dollars, or to

purchase a railway ticket to their final destination. For the price of 30¢, a hungry person could purchase an entire meal: bread, cheese, sausage, and lemonade.

In April of 1907, 11, 747 immigrants were processed at Ellis Island. During that same year, a total of 1,004, 756 people passed through, making 1907 the busiest year in the island's history. Following this year, a new law **mandated** that children under the age of 16 could not be processed at Ellis Island without an adult. In 1014, with the outbreak of World War I, the number of people arriving at Ellis Island dropped dramatically. Lawmakers had already excluded Chinese immigration in 1882 with the Chinese Exclusion Act. With the Immigration Act of 1917, much of Asia's citizens were denied entry, as were the "mentally or physically defective," homosexuals, and other "undesirable" people. Congress expanded limits in the Immigration Act of 1924, which restricted southern and Eastern European immigrants, as well as Jewish people. The total number of annual immigrants, this law stated, could not exceed 165,000.

Predictably, activity at Ellis Island subsided. Over the next few decades, it was used as a deportation center and a naval training center. In 1954, the immigration center officially closed. In the following years, Ellis Island's buildings fell into disrepair. By 1990, the famous red brick building was re-opened as the Ellis Island Immigration Museum.

chaotic *adj.* marked by confusion or disorder

A busy event with a crowded audience often contains chaotic activity.

arduous *adj.* requiring great effort or labor

Because our school has a competitive team, basketball tryouts were arduous.

mandated *v.* ordered

My mother mandated that I help with chores if I wanted her to help me buy a new tablet.

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