

First Official Federal Immigration Station

Ellis Island: Island of Hope & Tears

Prior to 1890, the individual states regulated immigration into the United States. After the Civil War, immigration increasingly fell under federal scrutiny, and the federal government passed laws to restrict the entry of immigrants thought to be undesirable including convicts, the sick and incapacitated. During the later part of the 19th century, religious discrimination, political instability and worsening economies in Europe fueled what would become the largest human migration in history. To handle the ever-increasing influx of newcomers, in 1890, President Benjamin Harrison designated Ellis Island, located in New York Harbor near the Statue of Liberty, as a federal immigration station.

Ellis Island was opened on January 1, 1892 and Annie Moore, a fifteen-year-old from Ireland traveling with her two brothers became the first immigrant processed there. Over the next 62 years, over 12 million immigrants entered the United States through this historic gateway.

The original wooden structure burned to the ground in 1897 and although no lives were lost, many years of Federal and State immigration records dating back to 1855 were destroyed. Fireproof buildings were then constructed and the new Main Hall was opened in 1900. During the peak immigration year, 1907, a total of 1,004,756 immigrants were processed at Ellis Island. Although the vast majority of those hopeful for a new life in the United States were admitted, roughly 2% were denied and sent back to their countries of origin due to chronic



contagious disease, criminal background, or mental illness. While the notion of island's nickname, Island of Hope is obvious, Island of Tears could refer not only to those unable to stay here, but also those moved with tears of joy with the promise of hope for a better future.

Today, over 100 million Americans can trace their ancestry to immigrants who first arrived in here through Ellis Island.

For more info about Ellis Island including an interactive virtual tour go to <https://www.nps.gov/ellis/index.htm>

To search for listed passengers by name go to <https://www.libertyellisfoundation.org/>

Newspaper Activity: Select a surname of a person mentioned or interviewed in this newspaper. Based on that name, search for a possible relative who came through Ellis Island. Dig a little deeper for the current distribution of that name in your state or across the US, then write a fictional story tracing a family tree from the original immigrant to the person named in the newspaper article. *Tip:* Obituaries from newspaper archives may be a good source for this information.

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