

The Immigration Experience

From the Russian Pale of Settlement to the U.S.

Early Immigrants – 1880's

At the time the Khazanovich family members first started to emigrate in about 1883, it was illegal to leave Russia. And though the Russian government more or less acquiesced to the smuggling of Jews over the border, they did not allow men of military age to emigrate. They had to be smuggled out, e.g. in the wagon of another traveler, via a professional smuggler, or by bribing border guards.

Passports were not needed to enter other countries, or to enter the US, so once the emigrant exited Russia they could, in theory, continue on to a seaport and depart for the US.

Most of those leaving Russia in the late 19th century traveled to Hamburg, Bremen, Rotterdam, Amsterdam or Antwerp. To get there, they crossed from Russia into Austria - Hungary or Germany, traveled to the nearest railway station and then journeyed across Europe by train to a North Sea port.

Given the location of our ancestors (to the south of Kovno on the map below), they probably would have entered Prussia, which was a province of Germany. From there, they could take the railway to a port. By 1881, a series of railways connected the Russian/German border to the port cities of Bremen and Hamburg. Koenigsberg might have been their point of rail departure. It was a Prussian town with a large Jewish community and rail station, located near the border.

Nighttime rail travel was cheaper, so most migrants arrived in port during the early hours of the morning. Having reached the port, the migrants would have to find lodgings until their ship was ready to sail.



Some immigrants, with no support from relatives or a family in America, couldn't afford a rail ticket and spent months working their way to the port cities, sometimes traveling by cart, or even on foot.

Sometimes travelers would have to wait days, weeks and even months at the port, either for their paperwork to be completed or for their ship to arrive. Train schedules were not coordinated with sailing dates. Assuming their paperwork was in order and tickets had been purchased, some provision was usually made for the care of the emigrants waiting for a ship. Steamship companies were required by the governments to watch over prospective passengers and, at most ports, the travelers were housed in

private boardinghouses. Some port cities even boasted their own "emigrant hotels."

The earliest immigrants from our family were Moshe Gornovsky and Khaym Leyb Leliansky. They may have had prepaid steamship tickets, which were available at the time.

As indicated on the sample ticket below, the cost of a prepaid ticket may have included rail transport.

Prepaid tickets allowed someone in the U.S. to purchase a ticket from a local agent. The shipping company sent the ticket, along with traveling instructions, to the addressee. The recipient contacted their local agent and from there was sent to the point of embarkation. The agents usually handled tickets as a side business and could be innkeepers, bankers, railroad employees, etc.

Moshe settled in Rochester, NY, taking the name Moses Liberman, and probably assisted other family members who followed him to Rochester. Based on a story that Dan Liberman related about his grandfather Girsha Gornovsky (Moshe's half brother), but which more likely applied to Moshe himself, Moshe may have received a prepaid ticket from a friend who was unable to make the trip. And he then adopted the friend's name, Liberman.

If he had not obtained the ticket in that way, another possibility is that family members provided loans to help him buy his ticket, or his family could have save the money.

Prepaid Ticket from 1881:

PREPAID PASSAGE RECEIPT

Norddeutscher Lloyd Steamship Co.

NEW YORK AND BREMEN FAST EXPRESS STEAMER (Schnelldampfer) LINE.

OELRICHS & CO., GENERAL AGENTS,

2 BOWLING GREEN, NEW YORK CITY.

No. F4695 NOT TRANSFERABLE

Place and Date *N.Y. October 10 1891*

RECEIVED *J.W. Beck* *Kornheff*

subject to the conditions printed on the back of this and in the notice attached, and with the understanding that in case of a reduction in sailing rates the passenger is entitled only to such part of the payments and transportation as is covered by the receipt.

the sum of *four 00/100*

to cover 1) payment of \$ — to the passenger; 2) payment to passenger of the cost of transportation in — Class from — BREMEN; 3) transportation thence in *2nd* Class of one of the Steamers of the NORD-DEUTSCHER LLOYD to NEW YORK, and 4) transportation from NEW YORK in EMIGRANT TRAIN to — for — persons, as in —

Max Strausz Agent.

Purchaser's Receipt for Prepaid Passage. * See other side and read carefully.

Khaym Leyb Leliansky probably followed his brothers to America, and therefore probably had assistance in purchasing his ticket. He lived in several places in the U.S. (Philadelphia, PA, New Jersey, Maine) and took the name Louis Lelansky. He in turn brought his wife Ester. They probably contributed in some way to Ester's brother Abram Khazanovich (Abraham Singer) coming to America, and he in turn brought the rest of his siblings.

Therefore it seems probable that the immigrants from our family all had assistance of some sort and obtained tickets before leaving home.

Transportation of immigrants was a big business in this time period. It had taken off with the advent of steamships and the idea of using the 'tween decks area for steerage passengers for the trip to the US (and for cargo on the return trip). All steerage tickets were sold without space reservations, so obtaining a ticket was easy. Principal shipping lines had hundreds of agencies in the United States and freelance ticket agents traveled through parts of Europe, moving from village to village, selling tickets.

But each stage in the journey was fraught with potential difficulties - corrupt officials, the danger of robbery and deception, and unplanned delays and expenses. Their steerage journey (and that of those who would follow) was by many accounts nightmarish (more below).

Those who arrived in America in the 1880s met with another problem in the big cities. There the earlier wave of German Jews had settled and become Americanized and prosperous, and they were not eager to be associated with the new wave of impoverished, orthodox, Jews. Jewish relief organizations were set up, and one of their tasks was to convince the new immigrants to settle elsewhere. This could be why Moshe Gornovsky (Moses Liberman) settled in Rochester, NY, and why the Lelanskys and Abram Khazanovich (Abraham Singer) settled in Maine. There is, in fact, a family story that Abraham was advised by a relief organization in Boston to move to a smaller town.

Later Immigrants – 1890's

Back in Russia, by the late 1880s, the Hamburg-America and other shipping lines expanded their network of ticket agents targeting immigrants in Eastern Europe. They advertised the glories of the new land and provided a one-price rate from *shtetl* to New York. Emigration inns were in the port cities of Bremen and Hamburg (in 1892), where emigrants would gather for the trip.

“Throughout East Europe, Jews talked longingly about America as the “goldene medinah’ (the golden province), and biblical imagery—“the land of milk and honey”—came easily to their lips. Those who could write were kept busy composing letters to distant kin—or even to husbands—in America. Children played at ‘emigrating games,’ and for the entire *shtetl* it was an exciting moment when the mail carrier announced how many letters had arrived from America.”

In 1892 it became legal to leave Russia if one had a passport to exit one's gubernia (province), but passports were expensive and difficult to get (and still impossible for males of military age) because of the bureaucratic impediments at every step (this continued into 1938 when the last family member emigrated). Large numbers left with forged papers, because that proved to be far easier than getting tangled in the red tape of the Czarist bureaucracy.

And many still had themselves smuggled across the frontier, assisted by local agents or smugglers who would divert or bribe the guards.

Prepaid tickets were becoming even more easily purchased, by a family member in the US or through the network of local ticket agents (an American relative could wire money via an immigrant bank). Often, shipping agents obtained the passports for the emigrants. The local agent also gave instructions on how to get to the port city.

(It became a common practice to put a number of persons of different families on a single passport, under one family name. In many cases the shipping agent pocketed the difference after charging each individual for the passport. It's possible that this action could have been the origination of some changes to family names, although there is no evidence that occurred in our family.)

As the process became better understood the flood of impoverished Russian emigrants grew. As they came through Germany fears were raised that they would settle there, and this led to tougher border rules. Emigrants were blocked at the border unless they had proof that they were traveling to America "at no cost," e.g. with the support of the Relief Agency for Russian Jews (whose goal was to assist the emigrants' departure) and/or a prepaid steamship ticket.



A Russian passport dated 1897

In 1891 the State Authorities made a big shed available for migrants, and in addition the Hamburg America Line was ordered to provide further accommodation. The city provided a site on the 'America quay' on which there were erected eight sheds, with room for 1400 persons. The migrants paid one mark a day for accommodation and food. Trains were directed straight to the sheds and those in possession of steerage tickets were not allowed to leave the train before the camp was reached. There they were medically examined and their clothing was disinfected.

From *Ellis Island to JFK* by Nancy Foner:

Arriving in Hamburg in 1892 with her Aunt Masha after days of travel by wagon and then train from a small village in western Russia, Rose Cohen wrote that "we were all shown (really driven) into a large room where many dirty, narrow cots stood along the walls." Her father, who had gone to NY two years earlier, had sent two prepaid steamship tickets to this family. Now in Hamburg "Aunt Masha shivered as she looked at the cot in which we two were to sleep... The air in the room was so foul and thick that it felt as if it could be touched. From every corner came sounds of groaning and snoring. But worst of all were the insects in the cot... We stayed in Hamburg a week. Every day from ten in the morning until 4 in the afternoon we stayed in a large, bare hall waiting for our names to be called." After the cholera epidemic of 1892, the German government subjected migrants from Eastern Europe to medical exams that included baths and fumigation. Rose Cohen remembers how her little "underwaist," which still had some money in it" was taken to be "steamed." Although the money was not touched, "when I looked at my pretty little slippers I wept bitter tears. They looked old, and wrinkled, and two of the buttons were off." In Hamburg, men and boys had their heads closely cropped and received a chemical shampoo; women and girls had their hair combed with fine-tooth metal combs."

It soon became impractical for all processing be performed in Hamburg. The German (Prussian) government set up a chain of border control stations, one of the first at Koenigsberg. There the Chief Border Committee processed immigrants, providing clothing and lodging, and support for those who were rejected for onward movement. Refugees going through Koenigsberg were provided with direct tickets for America by way of Stettin (a Prussian seaport), Hamburg and Bremen.



It was in 1892 that Girsha Gornovsky (Harry Liberman) emigrated. Being of military draft age, he probably had to be smuggled out of Russia. He probably left from the port of Hamburg, possibly via the rail system from Koenigsberg.

Left: Hamburg Quarantine Station 1890s.

Soon after Harry's arrival in the U.S. in 1892 there was a major cholera outbreak in Hamburg, which gave rise to (unfounded) fears that the epidemic was brought in by the immigrants. Border guards were ordered to

stop entry. The Hamburg America and Norddeutsche Lloyd shipping lines worked out a deal with the German government to bear the cost of examining and disinfecting immigrants at the border. These centers functioned as quarantine stations and caused more difficulties for some emigrants. If they had prepaid tickets for other shipping lines they might be turned back.

It's also not clear how long the Hamburg America and Norddeutsche Lloyd shipping lines had control of the Prussian border points. But tickets for the Holland America Line were apparently honored. (HAL had joined with the other two companies in 1882 to form the North Atlantic Steamer Lines Association, Nord-Atlantischer Dampfer-Linien Verband.)

In 1893 Shlomo Gornovsky (Sam Liberman) made his way to Rotterdam and left via the Holland America Line.

Also in 1893 a new U.S. immigration law went into effect, where each passenger had to answer a series of 29 questions (recorded on manifest lists) before boarding the ship. These questions included, among others: name, age, sex, marital status, occupation, nationality, ability to read or write, race, physical and -mental health, last residence, and the name and address of the nearest relative or friend in the immigrant's country of origin. Immigrants were asked whether they had at least \$30; whether they had ever been in prison, an almshouse, or an institution; or if they were polygamists or anarchists.

"Steamship lines were also held accountable for medical examinations of the immigrants before departing the port. Most seaport medical examinations were made by doctors employed by the steamship lines, but often the examination was just too rapid to disclose any but the most obvious diseases and defects. Disinfection (of both immigrants and baggage) and vaccination were routinely performed at the ports.

"Finally, with questions answered, medical exams completed, vaccinations still stinging and disinfectant still stinking, the immigrants were (boarded). Steerage passengers walked past the tiny deck space, squeezed past the ship's machinery and were directed down steep stairways into the enclosed lower decks. They were now in steerage, which was to be their prison for the rest of their ocean journey."

After 1893, increasing numbers of immigrants left from Libau (Liepaja), or Riga. Rail lines had been laid down in 1881 from Kovno to Libau. [Note that Russian railways were of a different gauge than those in Germany, so the rail lines originating in Russia generally didn't connect to the West.] Some migrants liked these ports because there were no medical inspections before sailing, and the direct sea-journey was cheaper than crossing mainland Europe. They could take "feeder ships" to the larger ports, though many of the ships traveled directly to England, where the emigrants often settled. Some continued on to America from Southampton.

But conditions on board these feeder ships were horrific - the vessels used were often designed for the shipment of cargo, foodstuffs or livestock. Also, the Russian authorities had control of these passengers and created more financial hurdles for those attempting to leave.

There is no evidence that family members ever took this route.

In 1895 Sheyne Gornovsky (Jennie Liberman), mother to Girsha and Shlomo, left Russia from Rotterdam. Despite traveling 2 years after the 1893 Immigration Act, her manifest did not show the 29 questions that were required, possibly appearing on a separate document.

More family members were to come from Rotterdam, including children of Mikhl Gornovsky, Khaym (Hyman) in 1901, Khaye (Ida) in 1903, Ester, Moshe (Morris) and Mikhl (Mitchel), all in 1905, and the family of Meyer Khazanovich in 1903.

1895 Steerage Ticket from Rotterdam:

Interims-Billet



von
B. Karlsberg & Co., Maaskade 20, Rotterdam.

Vor- und Familienname.	Alter.	Nach	County	State
<i>Heinrich Hermes</i>	<i>21</i>	<i>New York</i>		

Bedingener Ueberfahrtspreis.

Oceanfahrt:

Erwachsene à .*fl.* *100* - .*fl.* *100*

Kinder von 1-12 Jahren - - - - -

Kinder unter 1 Jahr - - - - -

Inlandfahrt:

Erwachsene à .*fl.* - .*fl.* -

Kinder von 5-12 Jahren - - - - -

Total .*fl.* *100*

Hierauf erhalten als Handgeld - *100*

Die Restpassage *fl. nichts* ist 2 Tage vor der Abfahrt zu zahlen.

Abfahrt von Rotterdam am *29* *Mai* d. *1895*
 via *Liverpool* pr. *Post* Dampfer der *Cunard* Line
 Rotterdam, den *29* *5* *1895*

Left for N. Y.

**B. Karlsberg & Co.
 Maaskade No. 20
 Rotterdam.**

Reclamationen wegen Rückgabe des eingezahlten Passagegeldes finden keine Berücksichtigung.

In 1898 Sara and Yankl (Jacob) Khazanovich sailed from Hamburg. Below is an example of a 1905 prepaid ticket from Hamburg.

549/54
Verzeichn. No.

16.
9/4

Hamburg-Amerika Linie, Hamburg.

Zwischendecksförderungs-Vertrag.

Zwischen der Hamburg-Amerika Linie und dem untenzeichneten Reisenden (bei Familien als Familienverband) ist der nachstehende Beförderungsvertrag geschlossen worden:

§ 1.
Die Hamburg-Amerika Linie übernimmt die Beförderung der in § 2 dieses Vertrages benannten Reisenden von Hamburg nach New-York im Zwischenstapel des deutschen Passiers **Hamburg** und von New-York weiter nach: County: _____ Staat: _____ per Eisenbahn (resp. Dampfschiff) III. Klasse (Emigration).

§ 2.
Während der Seefahrt erhalten die Reisenden die durch die gesetzlichen Bestimmungen vorgeschriebene Verpflegung. Die Verpflegung beginnt am Abfahrtstage nach erfolgter Ankerabnahme der Reisenden und endet mit deren Ankerabgehen im obersten Ausstiegsstapel.

§ 3.
Der Fahrpreis ist, wie folgt, vereinbart worden:

Vor- und Familien-Namen mit Geburts- und im 20. § erwähnte Beschäftigung	Alter	Besondere Anmerkungen	Wichtigste Wohrort	Preis für den Reisenden ab Hamburg ab New-York
Herrn Lehmann	40			150
Fräulein	39			150
Herrn	7			150
Herrn	3 1/2			150
Herrn	3 1/2			150
Herrn	1 1/2			150
in Summe				600

§ 4.
Käufer dem vorstehend bezeichneten Preis ist für Beförderung, Gepäcktransport, Befähigung oder Unterbringung von Hamburg bis zum außerordentlichen Ausstiegsstapel Nichts mehr zu bezahlen; es ist denn, daß für Gepäck Ueberfracht laut § 13 dieses Vertrages zu entrichten wäre. Die Kabinetskosten in Hamburg vom Eintreffen des Reisenden bis zu der in diesem Vertrage bezeichneten Abfahrtsstunde des Schiffes sind zu Lasten des Reisenden.

§ 5.
Die Abfahrt des Schiffes erfolgt vom Einshipungsorte der Gesellschaft, **Pasfänger-Verkaufsstelle, Hamburgerstraße**, am _____ Uhr.

Die Reisenden haben sich pünktlich zur Einshipung einzufinden; das Ausbleiben eines Reisenden zur festgesetzten Abfahrt zieht den Verlust des halben Schiffescheines nach sich.

Fortsetzung des Vertrages auf der Rückseite.

After 1900, in addition to a ticket, an immigrant had to secure a passport from local officials and a United States visa from either the nearest American consular office or from the local consul at the port.

From www.americanheritage.com :

At the emigration inns, they had to wait their turn. Thousands milled around, entreating officials for departure cards. There were scenes of near chaos—mothers shrieking, children crying; battered wicker trunks, bedding, utensils in wild disarray. At Hamburg, arriving emigrants were put in the “unclean” section of the Auswandererhallen until examined by physicians who decided whether their clothing and baggage had to be disinfected. After examination, Jews could not leave the center; other emigrants could.

The ocean voyage provided little respite. Immigrants long remembered the “smell of ship,” a distillation of many putrescences. Those who went in steerage slept on mattresses filled with straw and kept their clothes on to keep warm. The berth itself was generally six feet long, two feet wide, and two and a half feet high, and it had to accommodate the passenger’s luggage. Food was another problem. Many Orthodox Jews subsisted on herring, black bread, and tea which they brought because they did not trust the dietary purity of the ship’s food. Some ships actually maintained a separate galley for kosher food, which was coveted by non-Jewish passengers because it was allegedly better.

Unsophisticated about travel and faced by genuine dangers, Jewish emigrants found the overseas trip a long and terrifying experience. But when land was finally sighted, the passengers

often began to cheer and shout. "I looked up at the sky," an immigrant wrote years later. "It seemed much bluer and the sun much brighter than in the old country. It reminded me on [sic] the Garden of Eden."

Unhappily, the friendly reception that most immigrants envisioned in the new land rarely materialized. Castle Garden in the Battery, at the foot of Manhattan—and later Ellis Island in New York Harbor—proved to be almost as traumatic as the journey itself. Immigration officials were harassed, overworked, and often unsympathetic. Authorized to pass on the admissibility of the newcomers, immigration officers struck terror into their hearts by asking questions designed to reveal their literacy and social attitudes. "How much is six times six?" an inspector asked a woman in the grip of nervousness, then casually asked the next man, "Have you ever been in jail?"

Most immigrants went directly from Castle Garden or Ellis Island to the teeming streets of Manhattan, where they sought relatives or landsleit (fellow townsmen) who had gone before them. Easy marks for hucksters and swindlers, they were overcharged by draymen for carrying their paltry possessions, engaged as strikebreakers, or hired at shamelessly low wages.

"Greenhorn" or "greener" was their common name. A term of vilification, the source of a thousand cruel jokes, it was their shame and their destiny.

From <http://www.ohranger.com/ellis-island/immigration-journey>:

Steerage was enormously profitable for steamship companies. Even though the average cost of a ticket was only \$30, larger ships could hold from 1,500 to 2,000 immigrants, netting a profit of \$45,000 to \$60,000 for a single, one-way voyage. The cost to feed a single immigrant was only about 60 cents a day!

For most immigrants, especially early arrivals, the experience of steerage was like a nightmare (at one time, the average passenger mortality rate was 10 percent per voyage). The conditions were so crowded, so dimly dark, so unsanitary and so foul-smelling, that they were the single most important cause of America's early immigration laws. Unfortunately, the laws were almost impossible to enforce and steerage conditions remained deplorable, almost beyond belief. As late as 1911, in a report to President William H. Taft, the United States Immigration Commission said:

"The open deck space reserved for steerage passengers is usually very limited, and situated in the worst part of the ship, subject to the most violent motion, to the dirt from the stacks and the odors from the hold and galleys... the only provisions for eating are frequently shelves or benches along the sides or in the passages of sleeping compartments. Dining rooms are rare and, if found, are often shared with berths installed along the walls. Toilets and washrooms are completely inadequate; saltwater only is available.

"The ventilation is almost always inadequate, and the air soon becomes foul. The unattended vomit of the seasick, the odors of not too clean bodies, the reek of food and the awful stench of the nearby toilet rooms make the atmosphere of the steerage such that it is a marvel that human flesh can endure it... Most immigrants lie in their berths for most of the voyage, in a stupor caused by the foul air. The food often repels them... It is almost impossible to keep personally clean. All of these conditions are naturally aggravated by the crowding."

In spite of the miserable -conditions, the immigrants had faith in the future. To pass the time—a crossing could take anywhere from 10 days to more than a month, depending on the ship and weather—they would play cards, sing, dance and talk... talk... talk... Rumors about life in America, combined with stories about rejections and deportations at Ellis Island, circulated endlessly. There were rehearsals for answering the immigration inspectors' questions and hour upon hour was spent learning the strange new language.

By the time the tiring trip approached its long awaited end, most immigrants were in a state of shock: physically, mentally and emotionally. Yet, even with the shores of a new world looming before their eyes, and even with tears of relief streaming down their faces, their journey was not at an end.

The Inspection

Medical inspectors boarded incoming ships in the quarantine area at the entrance to the Lower Bay of New York Harbor. Ships were examined from 7 a.m. to 5 p.m. Vessels arriving after 5 p.m. had to anchor for the night.

The quarantine examination was conducted aboard ship and reserved for first- or second-class cabin passengers. U.S. citizens were exempt from the examination. Passengers were inspected for possible contagious diseases such as cholera, plague, smallpox, typhoid fever, yellow fever, scarlet fever, measles and diphtheria. Few cabin-class passengers were marked to be sent to Ellis Island for more complete examinations. For example, in 1905, of 100,000 cabin passengers arriving in New York, only 3,000 had to pass through Ellis Island for additional medical checks. During the same year, 800,000 steerage passengers were examined at the island.

After the visiting medical inspectors climbed down ladders to their waiting cutter, the ship would finally move north through the Narrows leading to Upper New York Bay and into the harbor. Slowly, the tip of Manhattan would come into view.

The first object to be seen, and the focus of every immigrant's attention, was the Statue of Liberty. Perhaps her overwhelming impact can best be described in the words of those who saw her in this way for the first time: "I thought she was one of the Seven Wonders of the World," exclaimed a German nearing his 80th birthday. A Polish man said: "The bigness of Mrs. Liberty overcame us. No one spoke a word for she was like a goddess and we know she represented the big, powerful country which was to be our future home."

Just beyond the statue, about a half mile to the northwest, was Ellis Island.

After the ship had docked in Manhattan, while cabin passengers were being released to the freedom of New York, steerage passengers poured across the pier to a waiting area. Each wore a nametag with the individual's manifest number written in large figures. The immigrants were then assembled into groups of 30, according to manifest letters, and were packed on the top decks of barges while their baggage was piled on the lower decks.

When they finally landed, with the ground still swaying like waves beneath their feet and the shrill shouts of a dozen different languages assaulting their ears, they met their first American, a nameless interpreter. In retrospect, it may be that these interpreters were the unsung heroes of the entire immigration screening process. Their patience and skill frequently helped save an immigrant from deportation.

The average number of languages spoken by an interpreter was six, but a dozen languages (including dialects) was not uncommon. The record for a single interpreter was 15 languages. Interpreters led groups through the main doorway and directed them up a steep stairway to the Registry Room. Although they did not realize it, the immigrants were already taking their first test: A doctor stood at the top of the stairs watching for signs of lameness, heavy breathing that might indicate a heart condition or "bewildered gazes" that might be symptomatic of a mental condition. As each immigrant passed, a doctor, with an interpreter at his side, would examine the immigrant's face, hair, neck and hands. The doctor held a piece of chalk. On about two out of every 10 or 11 immigrants who passed, he would scrawl a large white letter; that letter indicated whether or not that immigrant was to be detained for further medical inspection.

Should an immigrant be suspected of mental defects, an X was marked high on the front of the right shoulder; a plain X lower on the right shoulder indicated the suspicion of a deformity or disease; an X within a circle meant some definite symptom had been detected. And the "shorthand" continued: B indicated possible back problems; Pg, pregnancy; and so on. If an immigrant was marked, he or she continued with the process and then was directed to rooms set aside for further examination.

Sometimes whole groups would be made to bathe with disinfectant solutions before being cleared—not too surprising, considering how many were unable to bathe during the crossing. Again the line moved on. The next doctors were the dreaded "eye men." They were looking for symptoms of trachoma, an eye disease that caused blindness and even death. (This disease was the reason for more than half of the medical detentions and its discovery meant certain deportation.)

If immigrants had any of the diseases proscribed by the immigration laws, or were too ill or feebleminded to earn a living, they would be deported. Sick children age 12 or older were sent back to Europe alone and were released in the port from which they had come. Children younger than 12 had to be accompanied by a parent. There were many tearful scenes as families with a sick child decided who would go and who would stay.

Immigrants who passed their medical exams were now ready to take the final test from the "primary line" inspector who was seated on a high stool with the ship's manifest on a desk in front of him and an interpreter at his side. This questioning process was designed to verify the 29 items of information contained on the manifest. Since each "primary line" inspector had only about two minutes in which to decide whether each immigrant was "clearly and beyond a doubt entitled to land," nearly all of the immigrants received curt nods of approval and were handed landing cards. Most passed the test; only two percent of the immigrants seeking refuge in America would fail to be admitted. After only a few more hours on Ellis Island, they were free to go. Their journey was nearly complete.

Beyond Ellis Island

Those with landing cards in hand next moved to the Money Exchange. Here six cashiers exchanged gold, silver and paper money, from countries all over Europe, for American dollars, based on the day's official rates which were posted on a blackboard.

For immigrants traveling to cities or towns beyond New York City, the next stop was the railroad ticket office. There, a dozen agents collectively sold as many as 25 tickets per minute on the busiest days. Immigrants could wait in areas marked for each independent railroad line in the ferry terminal. When it was reasonably near the time for their train's departure, they would be ferried on barges to the train terminals in Jersey City or Hoboken. Immigrants going to New England went on the ferry to Manhattan.

All that remained was to make arrangements for their trunks, which were stored in the Baggage Room, to be sent on to their final destinations.

Finally! With admittance cards, railroad or ferry passes and box lunches in hand, the immigrants' journey to and through Ellis Island was complete. For many it had begun months or even years before. Some, of course, still had more traveling ahead of them — to the rocky shores of New England, to the great plains of the Midwest or to the orange groves of California.

But whatever lay ahead, in their hearts they could read the invisible sign that proclaimed, "Welcome to America."

The situation arriving in Boston was somewhat different:

In 1845, a customs house was constructed on Long Wharf at the terminus of State Street and this facility was used as an immigration processing station until the early 20th century. Only immigrants who needed to be detained due to paperwork or further examination were held at the station. Most were processed on the docks. By the early 20th century, a new facility was needed as the Long Wharf facility was deemed a fire hazard. The East Boston Immigration Station, often referred to as "Boston's Ellis Island," opened in 1920 and operated until 1954. As with the previous station on Long Wharf, most immigrants were processed on the docks, but those requiring further examination were brought to the immigration facility. During World War II, it was also used as a temporary detention center for German, Italian, and Japanese immigrants before they were moved on to other detention centers. - See more at:
<http://blogs.ancestry.com/ancestry/2014/07/17/5-things-about-the-port-of-boston/#sthash.FlcKEqHK.dpuf>

Read letters written home by immigrants and immigrant experiences:
http://www.jaha.org/edu/discovery_center/push-pull/letterstohome.html
<http://www.history.ac.uk/ihr/Focus/Migration/articles/brinkmann.html>

Internet sources of information:

www.movinghere.org.uk/galleries/histories/jewish/journeys/journeys.htm
www.americanheritage.com
www.helsinki.fi/iehc2006/papers2/Feys.pdf
<http://www.le.ac.uk>
<http://www.gjenvick.com>
http://www.ballinstadt.de/en/emigration_via_Hamburg.php
<http://www.ohranger.com/ellis-island/immigration-journey>

Compiled and researched by Laurel Singer

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