



ELLIS ISLAND

The Immigrant Experience

Immigrants

- **In 1860 the resident population of the U.S. was 31.5 million people. Between 1865 and 1920, close to 30 million additional people entered the country.**
- **These people were fleeing crop failures, land and job shortages, rising taxes and famine. Some were also escaping religious or political persecution.**



Klassen family leaving the Ukraine for the U.S.

The Island



- Ellis Island served as the portal for a majority of new immigrants from 1892 till it closed in 1954.
- More than 12 million immigrants were processed here.

Baggage Room



- The arriving immigrants checked most of their heaviest baggage in the first-floor baggage room before heading to the great hall for processing by U.S. Immigrations Inspectors.

Stairs of Separation

- As the immigrants walked up the staircase, U.S. Public Health Officials watched them for signs of a number of illnesses.



The Great Hall



The Great Hall cont.



- **Also known as the Registry Room, this is where millions of immigrants were processed for admission to the United States.**
- **After waiting in line for hours, an interview with the inspector would determine the applicants future.**

Medical Exams



- **The Inspector would take about 7 seconds to determine if the immigrant had any infectious diseases.**
- **Some would be sent back and some detained in quarantine.**
- **Only two percent of the arriving immigrants were excluded from entry.**

Cafeteria

- Here immigrants were served their first “taste of America”.
- They were often introduced to new dishes—such as ice cream.



Dormitories

- Immigrants that were detained for medical or other reasons stayed in these rooms, tightly packed with rows of bunk beds.



The Kissing Post

- After immigrants were approved for admission, they would walk down the stairs to meet their loved ones.
- This area became known as the kissing post.



Final Destination



Final Destination cont.

- Only one third of the immigrants who came to the United States through Ellis Island stayed in New York City. Most scattered across the country.
- Immigrants were given tags to pin to their hats or coats. The tags showed railroad conductors what lines the immigrants were traveling and what connections to make to reach their destinations.

Cities

- The arrival of large numbers of immigrants radically changed the face of the nation's cities.
- Before the Civil War, cities were compact.
- Between 1865 and 1900 the percentage of Americans living in the cities doubled.
- Cities grew upward. Prior to the Civil War, buildings were built only to five stories.

Cities cont.

- “Noise, traffic jams, slums, air pollution, and sanitation and health problems became commonplace. Mass transit, in the form of trolleys, cable cars, and subways, was built, and skyscrapers began to dominate city skylines. New communities, known as suburbs, began to be built just beyond the city. Commuters, those who lived in the suburbs and traveled in and out of the city for work, began to increase in number”.

memory.loc.gov

Urban Living Conditions

- Immigrants often lived in buildings abandoned by middle-class residents and converted into multifamily units.
- These tenements soon became identified as “slums”.
- Many families would cram into spaces only meant for a few.
- Many immigrants tended to settle with others from the same country creating the ethnic neighborhoods and sections that can still be found in many big cities today.

Urban Living Conditions cont.

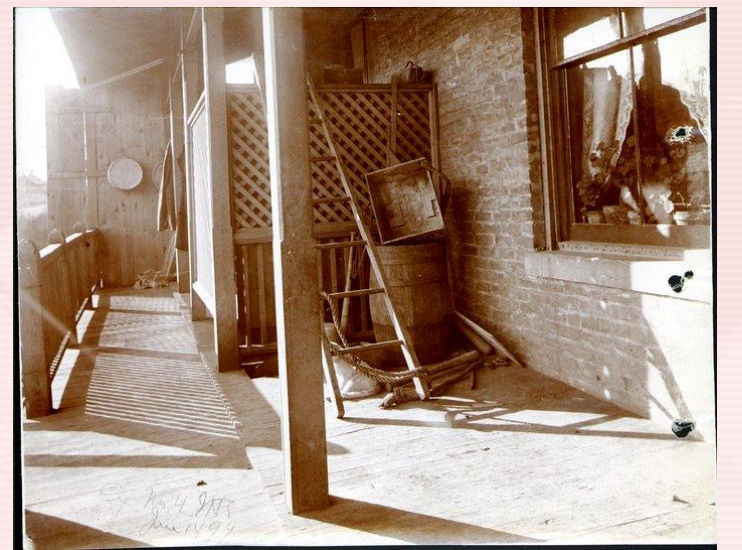
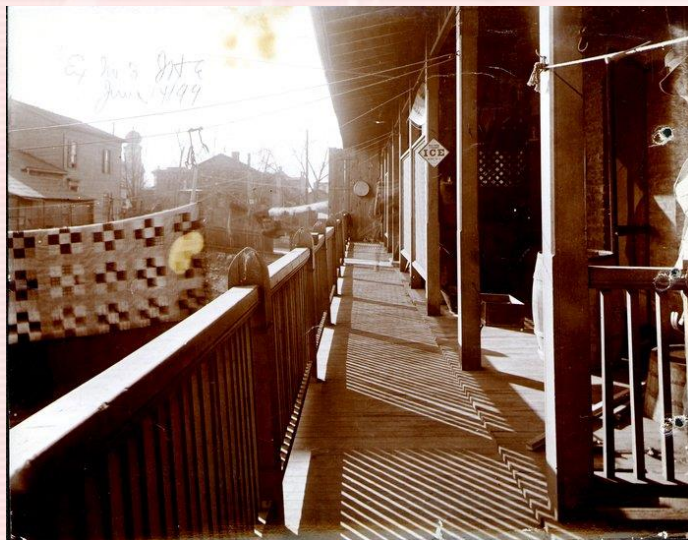
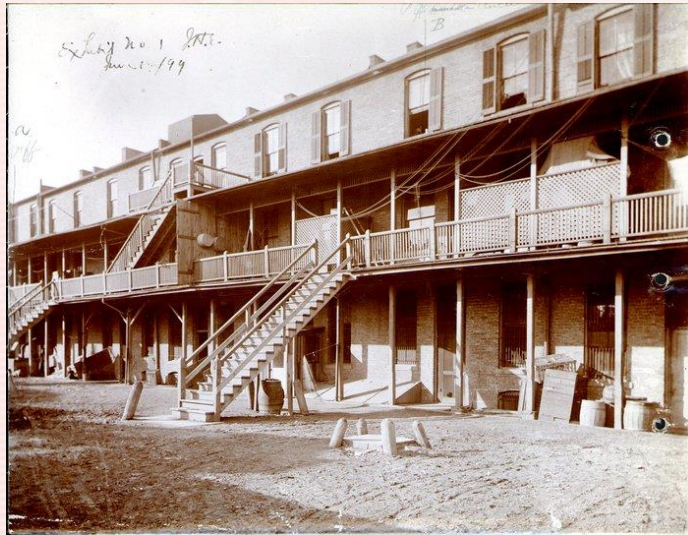
- Outside the tenements, raw sewage and garbage littered the streets.
- Contagious diseases raged in such conditions.
- Babies were especially susceptible.
- In NYC, in one district of tenements, six out of ten babies died before their first birthday.

Tenement Housing



Tenement housing in New York City.

A typical tenement house on the corner of Ontario and Monroe streets in Toledo, Ohio.



Resources

- <http://www.historychannel.com/ellisisland/gateway/index.html>
- <http://catalog.loc.gov/>
- <http://worlddmc.ohiolink.edu>
- www.ohiohistory.org
- America: Pathways to the Present