



## IN HISTORY: IMMIGRATION AND ETHNIC HERITAGE

# Time Line

## Ellis Island: A New Gateway to the United States

As a result of increased immigration and changing federal laws, Ellis Island, the immigration station for the port of New York, officially opened on January 1, 1892, to inspect, process, and register new settlers. Originally called Gull Island, it was acquired by the State of New York in 1808 and later turned over to the federal government. As they arrived by ship at Ellis Island, steerage-class immigrants (those of limited economic means) had numbered tags pinned to their clothes that indicated the “manifest page,” a register and line number on which their names appeared. These numbers were later used by immigration inspectors to cross-reference immigrants while they were being scrutinized. The process could be grueling. Inspectors screened for a range of “undesirables,” including specific ethnic communities, polygamists, people with prison records for crimes involving “moral turpitude,” and all “persons suffering from a loathsome or contagious diseases,” old age, or other infirmities. Unescorted women and children were detained until their safety was assured through the arrival of a telegram, letter, or a prepaid ticket from a waiting relative. Immigration officials refused to send single women into the streets alone, nor could they leave with a man not related to them. According to Ellis Island historians, only 2 or 3 percent of all immigrants were refused entry.

The peak year of immigration was 1907, when more than one million immigrants passed through Ellis Island. By 1924, when Congress began restricting mass immigration more aggressively, more than seventeen million people immigrated through the port of New York. After 1924 immigrants were more commonly inspected in their countries of origin. After that time, the island was primarily used as a detention center for illegal immigrants or those facing deportation and during World War II for enemy aliens. In 1954 the Inspection Station closed and in 1990 it was officially reopened as a national monument.

Ellis Island was the international gateway not only to New York but to every community in the United States. More than 100 million Americans can trace their ancestry to a man, woman, or child whose name passed from a steamship manifest sheet to an inspector’s record book in the Registry Room at Ellis Island.

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## Ellis Island Immigration Statistics

This chart shows the number of immigrants by country of origin who passed through Ellis Island from January 1892 to June 1897, and from 1901 to 1931. Exceptions to those years are noted in parentheses. Nations with significant immigrant populations in Indiana include Russia, Austria-Hungary, Germany, England, Ireland, Greece, Scotland, Poland and Yugoslavia.

Italy	2,502,310
Russia	1,893,542
Hungary (1905–1931)	859,557
Austria (1905–1931)	768,132
Austria-Hungary (1892–1904)	648,163
Germany	633,148
England	551,969
Ireland	520,904
Sweden	348,036
Greece	245,058
Norway	226,278
Ottoman Empire	212,825
Scotland	191,023
The West Indies	171,774
Poland (1892–1897 and 1920–1931)	153,444
Portugal	120,725
France (including Corsica)	109,687
Denmark	99,414
Romania (1894–1931)	79,092
The Netherlands	78,602
Spain	72,636
Belgium	63,141
Czechoslovakia (1920–1931)	48,140
Bulgaria (1901–1931)	42,085
Wales	27,113
Yugoslavia (1920–1931)	25,017
Finland (1920–1931)	7,833
Switzerland	1,103