



IN HISTORY: IMMIGRATION AND ETHNIC HERITAGE

Time Line

Early Immigration to Indiana

Early immigrants to Indiana came primarily from Europe, frequently from Great Britain and Germany. Most settlers were farmers, seeking new, fertile tracts of land. They traveled to the United States by ship, often in steerage, the area below the main deck of the ship where fares were cheaper. The ocean voyage from northern Europe to America usually lasted several weeks, but could take more than a month in bad weather. In steerage the decks were narrow and usually had a ceiling height of less than six feet. Water and food were often insufficient to meet the needs of these passengers. Living quarters were cramped. Up to three hundred people might be sleeping on single cots stacked two or three high, with little room for more than luggage by their bedside. Often, more passengers than allowed were taken on board. The only air and light available was through a hatchway that was kept closed during stormy or rough weather.

Before 1855 there was no immigrant processing center in the United States. Shipping companies simply presented a passenger list to the Collector of Customs at ports along the eastern seaboard. After arriving in the United States, passengers made whatever customs declaration was necessary and went on their way. They then had to deal with new problems. Peddlers and tavern keepers

boarded the ships to make direct deals with the newly arriving immigrants. Once the immigrants arrived at the dock, they were sometimes sold tickets to the wrong destinations, cheated while changing money, and talked into paying money for lodging in rundown boardinghouses. But for many, the possibility of creating a new life in this country was worth every challenge.

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