

3-D Imaging Past & Present

STEREO WORLD

Volume 30, Number 2

A Publication of
National
Stereoscopic
Association, Inc.



**Unseen
Ellis Island**

**John Cramb's Journey
Museum Stereo Exhibits**

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A Publication of
National Stereoscopic Association, Inc.



Volume 30, Number 2
2004

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Front Cover:

Unseen and unchanged for 50 years, this view of the Statue of Liberty is through the windows of a Measles Ward on Ellis Island, one of 29 buildings abandoned to weather, time and vandalism in 1954. Our feature "Unseen Ellis Island—Island of Hope, Island of Tears" by Sheldon Aronowitz and Gary Schacker includes dozens of stereos from their unique and monumental documentation project.

Back Cover:

Immigrants undergo quick physical examinations during Ellis Island's busiest days in a vintage stereo from our feature "Unseen Ellis Island" by Sheldon Aronowitz and Gary Schacker. (Collection of Louise Goldstein)

EDITOR'S VIEW

Comments and Observations

John Dennis

Ellis Island

Immigration has been a controversial topic in one way or another for about 200 years—coming to a boil again in the currently very polarized political climate. So this seems a fitting time to take a deep look into the place where so many of the ancestors of today's Americans entered the country, New York's Ellis Island.

In 1990 one major building was restored and opened (with great fanfare), as a museum, leaving 29 other historical structures on the island to continue the process of decay that started when they were abandoned in 1954. NSA members Sheldon Aronowitz and Gary Schacker were able to arrange permission to stereograph the buildings in 2003 (with some help from an NSA grant), providing a unique opportunity to document what had become, in effect, a ruin of the mid 20th century. Like structures in a *Twilight Zone* set representing a town abandoned for 50 years after some nuclear or biological disaster, these Ellis Island hospital wards, hallways, dormitories and cafeterias were comprehensively stereographed in their long uninhabited and unmaintained state just prior to a stabilization project that will preserve them for possible restoration if funding becomes available.

Unlike the monumental, railway terminal-like Grand Hall, now restored as the Immigration Museum, it was in the other buildings that some immigrants spent far more time in treatment or detention, and where even more intense human dramas played out for better or worse. Capturing them in their present state of decay may in many ways provide a more compelling and evocative stereoscopic record than would posed views from their functioning days or stereos of pristine, restored rooms with furniture in place and the lights on.

This huge complex of buildings where millions of immigrants were

examined, welcomed, processed, terrified, treated, and sometimes rejected is clearly worth preservation—both through stereographs and eventual full restoration. If people can experience the rooms where immigrants were detained not knowing the outcome of their physical or mental health conditions or other tests of entry status, it may help enrich often simplistic popular opinions regarding immigrants then and now that either romanticize or demonize them.

Many more stereos of Ellis Island, both vintage and from 2003, will be projected in a Stereo Theater presentation by Gary Schacker and Sheldon Aronowitz at the 2004 NSA Convention in Portland, July 7-12. Having seen a preview of the 20 minute show, I can easily recommend it as one of the best stereoscopic documentaries ever made and as one more good reason to attend the 2004 convention.

Lenticular Sails

A possible alternative means of traveling to the 2004 NSA convention is pictured in the lenticular postcard included with this issue, courtesy of Victor Jauch of Lantor, Ltd. on the firm's tenth anniversary. This could be an ideal way to communicate with folks back home while at the convention or on other trips. Lantor markets over 750 stock 3-D lenticular images on products from address books to pencil cases, notebooks, postcards, magnets and CD cases. The well crafted images, which don't try to exceed the limits of the medium, fall mainly somewhere between cute and sentimental, plus a few nudes and scenics. To see the gallery of images or order products, visit: www.lantorltd.com/, 25835 Narbonne Ave., Lomita, CA 90717, (310) 530-1165. ☎

California Cutbacks Threaten Museum

The University of California/California Museum of Photography (SW Vol. 29 No. 1, p 35) has been promoting photography and related imaging technologies since 1973. UCR/CMP moved to its present location in 1990, an acclaimed three-storied facility on Riverside's popular pedestrian mall. UCR/CMP's permanent collections include the priceless Keystone-Mast archive of 350,000 stereograph prints and negatives dating from 1870.

2002 NSA Riverside convention attendees were thrilled to learn that the UCR/CMP collections room would more than double in size due to the University of California, Riverside's purchase of the adjacent building, the city of Riverside's renovation and a \$500,000 "Save America Treasures" grant.

But in mid April it was learned that the University planned to

slash the museum's budget by \$130,000 eliminating three positions, including the curator. This 40% cut would reduce the staff (already the smallest of any university museum in California) to three people and effectively shut down public access to its exhibits and collections. The cut would also mean the loss of large federal matching grants. University of California Regents offered no explanation of why the UCR/CMP was being cut 40% instead of the 7.5% cut expected across the system as a whole. If an organized letter writing campaign or appeal for donations is announced, it will be publicized on the NSA web site, at the NSA convention, and in *Stereo World*. Just one interesting and timely sample of stereoviews from the museum's collection is a selection of views taken in Iraq. Visit www.cmp.ucr.edu/photography/iraq/.

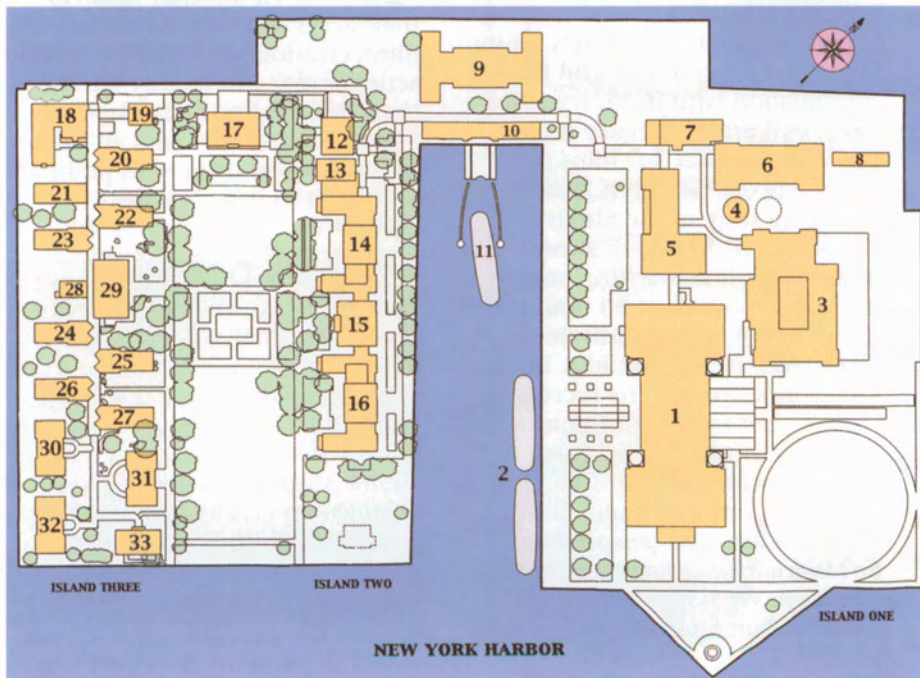
Unseen Ellis Island

Island of Hope, Island of Tears

by Sheldon Aronowitz and Gary Schacker

Text: Sheldon Aronowitz • Photography: Gary Schacker & Sheldon Aronowitz

The images presented in this article, except for the vintage views and a few other exceptions, focus primarily on the 29 abandoned and decaying buildings of Ellis Island—known as the “South Side”—as this was the subject and focus of our 3-D photographic study. However, for contextual purposes, this article covers the full history of immigration to America from the earliest times to the present.



Locator map of the main buildings on Ellis Island. Many are connected by enclosed, one or two story hallways. 1: Immigration Museum (Grand Hall). 2: Ferry Slip. 3: Baggage & Dormitory. 4: Water Tower. 5: Kitchen & Laundry. 6: Powerhouse 1. 7: Bakery & Carpentry. 8: Storage. 9: Immigrant Building. 10: Ferry Building. 11: Sunken Ferry. 12: Hospital Out-building. 13: Psychopathic Ward. 14: Old Hospital. 15: Administration. 16: Hospital Extension. 17: Recreation Hall. 18: Powerhouse 2 & Morgue. 19: Office. 20-27: Measles Wards. 28: Kitchen. 29: Administration. 30-32: Isolation Wards. 33: Staff House.

.....
 A view of the hospital
 complex on Island 2
 from the restored
 Library/Exhibits
 offices on Island 1. The
 Statue of Liberty lies
 just several hundred
 yards beyond. All 2003
 Stereos by Gary
 Schacker & Sheldon
 Aronowitz



.....
 Baggage and Dormito-
 ry building. Severe ceil-
 ing damage is proof
 that falling debris is a
 constant danger.



.....
 A view of the back of
 the Administration
 building with its broken
 windows leaving the
 interior open to the ele-
 ments. The foreground
 building was a large
 kitchen serving patients
 in the wards.



When one thinks of immigration to America, one thinks of "Ellis Island" in an almost synonymous fashion—and for good reason. Although not the only immigration center of its time, (there were 70 others!) Ellis Island was certainly the largest and the longest running, processing 90% of all immigrants during the peak immigration years, and over 12 million immigrants since its opening on January 1, 1892 until its closing (as an immigration processing center) in 1954. However, immigration to America started well before Ellis Island.

It is a common belief that America was originally peopled by wanderers from Northeast Asia about 20,000 years ago, becoming the ancestors of today's Native Ameri-

cans. Others believe that the first Americans came from Polynesia or South Asia. Around the year 1,000 a small number of Vikings arrived.

Immigration to America, as we know it today, actually began in 1620 when 102 English Colonists (pilgrims) set sail on the *Mayflower*. They landed in Plymouth, Massachusetts, in what many consider to be the start of planned European immigration to America. The Swedes were to follow, and then there was a constant flow of immigrants—mostly from Germany and Ireland—escaping the crop failures. This was followed by groups from the Netherlands, Spain, Italy, the Scandinavian countries, and Eastern Europe.

Throughout the 1800s, and intensifying in the latter half of



Long hallway leading through the entire ward complex (measles, isolation and contagious disease) on Island 3. These long and now eerie hallways were vividly remembered by immigrants interviewed years later.

the 19th century, political instability, restrictive religious laws, and deteriorating economic conditions in Europe were some of the reasons leading to the largest human migration in the history of the world. 70% of the immigrants coming to America during this period, about 8 million, were processed at New York State's immigration center and predecessor to Ellis Island, Castle Garden.

Castle Garden was actually built as a fort in 1811, and was one of five forts built in then "defenseless" New York City after the British attack on the American frigate the *Chesapeake*. It was renamed Castle Clinton, in honor

of New York City Mayor and later New York State Governor DeWitt Clinton, after the War of 1812. In June of 1824 it became an entertainment center and was renamed Castle Garden. It served as an immigration center from 1855 to 1890—when the growing number of immigrants, compounded by corruption and incompetence at Castle Garden, forced its closing. It became the New York City Aquarium until 1941 and is now a relatively little known visitor's center for the National Parks in New York City as well as one of the ticket centers for the trip to Ellis Island and the Statue of Liberty.

The Federal government, in 1890, took over the responsibility of immigration from the individ-

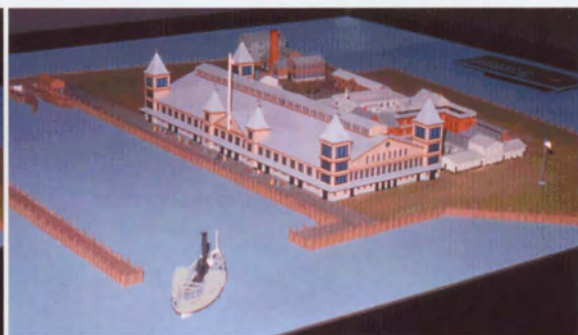
Immigrants undergo quick physical examinations in what looks a carefully posed view, from original negatives taken during Ellis Island's busiest days. (Collection of Louise Goldstein)



Immigration Museum model of Ellis Island in its original state, site of Fort Gibson prior to the War of 1812.



Ellis Island Immigration Center as it appeared on opening day, January 1, 1892. This large pinewood structure burned on June 14, 1897.



Immigration Museum model of Ellis Island as it appeared prior to about 1923, when the area of water visible between islands three and two was filled in to create the Ceremonial Lawn. The three islands with the buildings and hallways pictured in the article are seen here from the south.



Model of Castle Garden as it appeared during its use as an immigration center from 1855-1890.



ual states. A new immigration station was built on Ellis Island, which opened its doors on January 1, 1892. Annie Moore, a 15 year old Irish girl, was the first of the more than 12,000,000 immigrants to be processed at Ellis Island.

Ellis Island is located in the upper New York Bay, between Manhattan and New Jersey—closer to New Jersey than Manhattan—about one mile from the southern tip of Manhattan, and within a stone's throw of the Statue of Liberty. (Its jurisdiction lies both with New York and New Jersey.) Ellis Island was originally known to

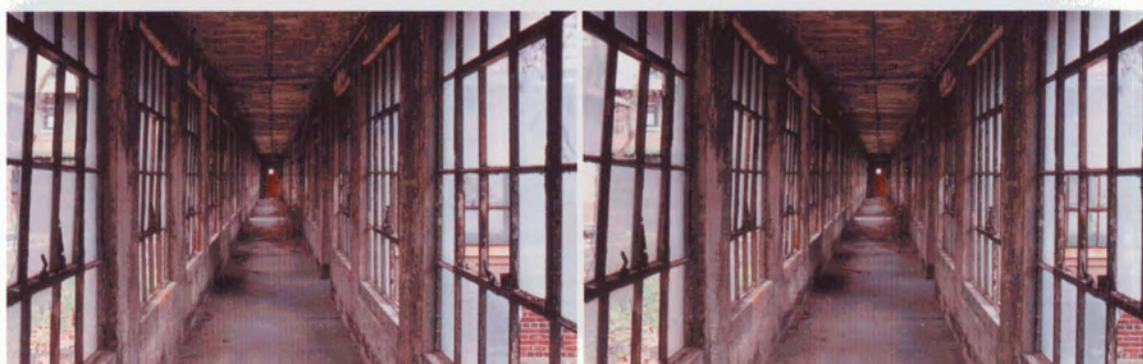
Native Americans as Gull Island, named for the birds that were its only inhabitants. It consisted of 3.3 acres of mud and clay which barely rose above high tide. The Island was purchased from the Native Americans by the colonist governors of Nieuw Amsterdam (later named New York), on July 12, 1630, who renamed it Little Oyster Island because of the delicious oysters found in its sands. The Island, then considered good only for oystering, changed ownership many times during the next century. During the 1700s it was called Gibbet Island alluding to its



.....
*Exterior of the hospital
 complex on Island 2.*



.....
*A rear view of the
 Measles Ward with its
 heavily rusted stairway.*



.....
*This narrow hallway
 lined with large win-
 dows must have been
 a beautiful, wonderfully
 lit architectural feature
 in its day.*

use for executions, by the hanging from a "gibbet", of state criminals. During the American Revolution the island passed into the hands of Samuel Ellis. On June 8, 1808, it was purchased by the Federal Government for \$10,000 for the purpose of building Fort Gibson prior to the War of 1812. As the years passed it was used only to store ammunition until, in 1890, the Federal Government chose it as the site for the new immigration center, replacing Castle Garden. Another island of those in New York Harbor which were under consideration was Bedloe's Island, on which stands the Statue of Liberty.

The "Barge Office" in Battery Park, near Castle Garden, served as temporary Immigration Center while Ellis Island was being readied. It was no small task to convert three acres of mud and sand to a

first class immigration center. Landfill from the subway tunnels and from the Grand Central Station excavation was brought in to create the ground for the construction of the new buildings, doubling the Island's size. Docks were constructed and channels were dug. Georgia Pine (a soon to be realized fatal error) was chosen for the construction of the buildings. A staff of one thousand (officers, inspectors, interpreters, engineers, cooks, doctors, nurses, and numerous other categories) was hired and Ellis Island opened as New York's immigration center on January 1, 1892. The cost grew from the initial estimate of \$150,000 to a final cost of \$500,000 (equivalent to about \$10,000,000 today).

On June 14, 1897, shortly after midnight and without warning, a disastrous fire broke out and the pine buildings were immediately

.....
This vintage lighting fixture in the Measles Ward surrounded by the ubiquitous flaking paint has emitted no light for five decades.



.....
Debris from a crumbling ceiling provides a medium for the growth of moss in this long unused bathroom sink.



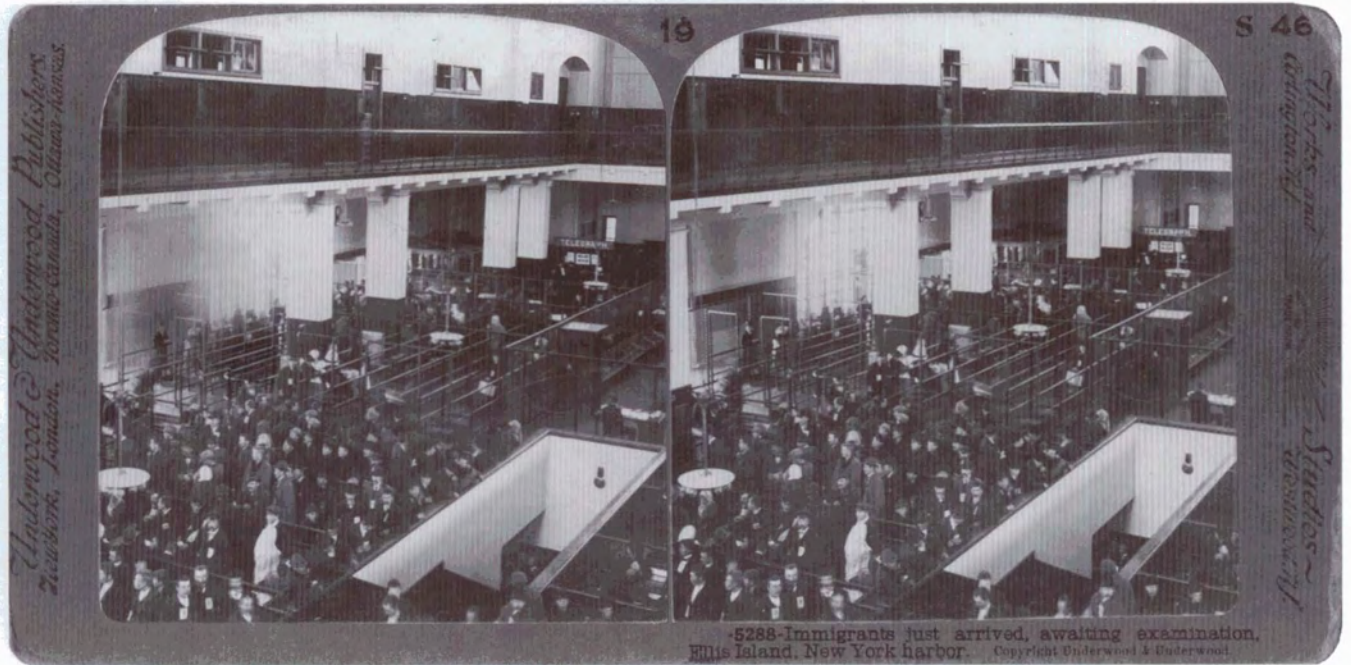
.....
Floor sweeper and hand sprayer, Isolation Ward. These everyday implements have rested untouched in these abandoned buildings for generations.



consumed. Hours later the Island was bare. Miraculously, not one life was lost!

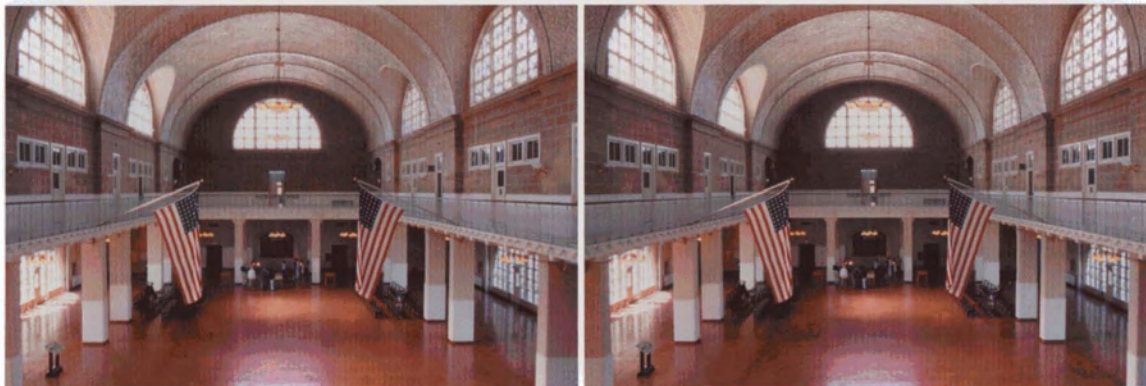
Congress approved \$600,000 for rebuilding, and the Barge Office was again used in the interim. The buildings were now constructed to strict safety standards and were fireproof. The architectural style was grand and magnificent. The main building is considered to be one of only a few "grand scale brick buildings" in New York City. It showcases a dramatic vaulted ceiling tiled by the Guastavinos family, themselves having arrived in New York City as immigrants, using a now lost art and technique involving the "weaving" of three layers of tiles together. At a final cost of \$1,500,000, Ellis Island reopened on December 17, 1900.

For the emigrants, the journey to Ellis Island was one which drained them of their finances as well as their emotional and physical strength. There were many reasons they came to America—some to escape religious persecution, some to escape famine and poverty, some to escape flu or other epidemics, and countless other reasons—but all to make a better life for themselves and their families. Not living near one of the primary ports of Liverpool, England, or Naples, Italy, or Hamburg, Germany, meant a long and difficult journey by foot or train. Crossing through borders was fraught with red tape and corruption, and sleeping in fields or inns often resulted in theft of their few belongings. The trip to port could take weeks,



Underwood #5288, "Immigrants just arrived, awaiting examination. Ellis Island, New York harbor." A view from the balcony of the Great Hall. (Collection of Louise Goldstein)

No heat or air conditioning in steerage meant freezing in the win-



The restored Great Hall. In this large room, often thousands of immigrants were processed daily. The ceiling features the tile work of the Guastavinos family.

and then when they reached the port, a wait of days or weeks for their ship to depart was not uncommon.

Since the ships were required to return, at the ship's expense, any immigrant who failed to gain acceptance to America, many were refused passage. Families sometimes had to save for months just to get to the ship and purchase the \$10 passage ticket. Until the mid 1800s sailing ships took from 40 days to six months to cross the Atlantic. In the late 1800s steamships cut the trip to about a month. Most immigrants could only afford the "steerage" class, where up to 2,000 immigrants were crowded below the ship's decks surrounded by the steering equipment. There was no fresh air, little food, usually only one or two toilets, and disease spread quickly.

ter and roasting in the summer. Many died aboard ship from typhus, cholera, measles, and other diseases and were buried at sea.

When the ships finally arrived at New York City's Hudson or East River Piers, the few wealthier 1st and 2nd class passengers were given a cursory exam on ship and entered New York City. The steerage passengers however, had, on some occasions, to wait on the ship a few more nights before barges and/or ferries could take them to Ellis Island for further examination and processing. Ironically, the "land of equality" did not apply to the immigrants in steerage!

Upon entering Ellis Island the immigrants climbed a staircase to the large registry room, known as the Great Hall, where they would be examined by doctors and immi-

.....
*This large autoclave
 was used for the steril-
 ization of mattresses.*



.....
*A view of the Statue of
 Liberty through the
 smashed windows of
 the Measles Ward. The
 presence of the Statue
 just a few hundred
 yards away must have
 been a constant emo-
 tional stimulus to those
 confined to these
 wards anxiously await-
 ing final determination
 of their status.*



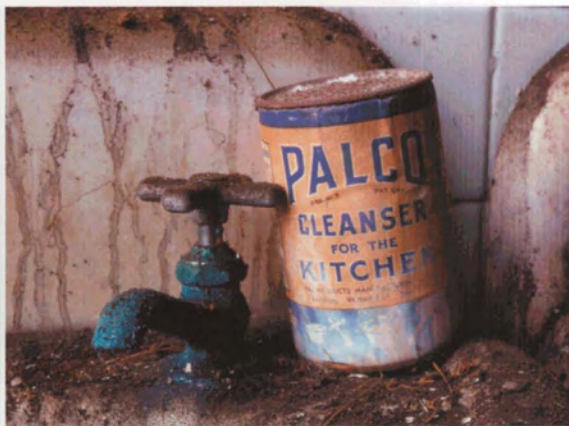
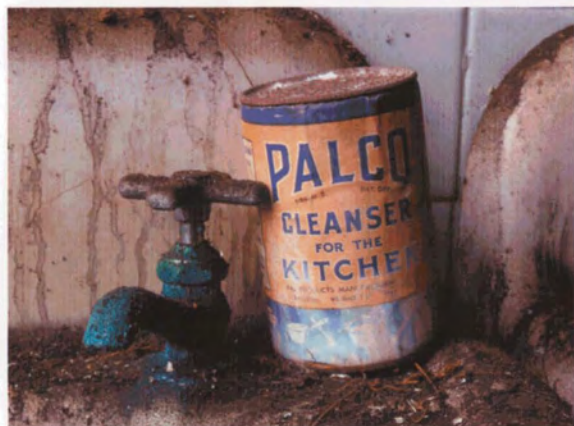
.....
*Various pieces of deteri-
 orating vintage furni-
 ture can be found
 throughout the com-
 plex.*



gration inspectors. Metal pipes divided the large space into narrow aisles and some sections were enclosed in wire mesh. (The iron pipes were later removed and replaced by long rows of wooden benches.) With thousands of immigrants in the Great Hall at any given time, each speaking one of more than 30 different languages, the noise was likened to the "Tower of Babel".

Ellis Island was like a miniature city unto itself—a city of thousands of anxious immigrants. There were waiting rooms, dormitories for over a thousand people, restaurants, a hospital, a psychiatric facility, a baggage room, banks, a post office, a railroad ticket office, laundries, a courtroom, a

kindergarten, a bakery, etc. Unbeknownst to the immigrants, their medical exam began before they even knew. While they climbed the staircase to the Great Hall, doctors watched and took note if they limped or became short of breath. They observed their skin, throat, hands, and scalp. All immigrants were asked their names only to check if they could hear and speak. The doctors would then use a metal button hook to roll their eyelids back to check for the contagious eye disease trachoma. The walk up the stairs was called the "six second medical"—the balance of the exam taking not much longer, about two minutes. These U.S. Public Health Service doctors were trained to spot any of more



.....
A long defunct brand
of kitchen cleanser
stands unused for
decades amidst accu-
mulating dirt and oxi-
dation.
.....



.....
Time takes its toll on
hardware and paint.
.....



.....
This large hall served
as an open dorm dur-
ing peak immigration
years and later housed
enemy aliens during
WWII. Many rooms on
Ellis Island featured
exquisite tile work.
.....

than 60 specific diseases almost immediately.

When the doctors noted a problem it would be marked in chalk on the back of the immigrant's clothes, by the shoulder. To name a few, an "X" meant mental problems, "B" back problems, "E" eye problems, "P" lung problems, "SC" scalp problems, "L" lameness, and "CT" for the dreaded trachoma—an almost certainty of deportation. Having a mark meant further examination. An incurable or contagious disease, mental illness, suspicion that you would become a public charge (unable to find work), illiteracy, criminal past, or any other of a multitude of prob-

lems or conditions could mean refusal of entry and deportation.

A particular dilemma for the immigrants was how to answer the question: "Do you have a job?" If they said "no" they could be chalked with "LPC"—liable to become a public charge, and possibly deported. If they said "yes" they would surely be deported! (The Congressional ban on contract labor precluded any immigrant from having a job waiting for them upon arrival for fear they would have accepted lower wages than American workers and thereby take jobs away from those already living and working here.) Word soon got around that the correct answer was: "I am able and

.....
Maternity Ward. This large, now empty room once echoed with the cries of the newest immigrant Americans.



.....
This room, which once served as a kindergarten for children of detained immigrants, is one of several areas now claimed by pigeons as evidenced by the accumulation of guano.



.....
Rear of Isolation Ward with deteriorating staircases, doors and windows. Although heavily damaged from vandalism and the elements, these well constructed buildings are considered structurally sound.



willing to work and with the help of my friends and family I will have no problem finding work." The first and second class passengers were not subject to this screening or the resulting possible deportation. In theory, their "affluence" precluded their having the above conditions or problems. In the haste of the exam, not all the decisions by the inspectors were fair or accurate. One young girl with an "X" on her back feared deportation and turned her coat inside out and put it back on. She passed all the other tests and was granted admission to America.

Ultimately, whether the immigrants passed all the examinations or were detained, they were tunneled down the "staircase of separation"—a wide staircase, divide into three sections by two center

railings, leading out of the Great Hall (Registry Room). Those descending on the right, about 50%, proceeded to a New Jersey train station for destinations west, south, and north; those on the left, about 30%, to a ferry, arriving 20 minutes later at the tip of Manhattan and on to the squalid "Tenement District"; the balance going down the center to the much feared detention rooms, legal hearings, hospitalization, or deportation.

All immigrants with curable diseases were hospitalized until they were better. (The hospital, known as the Marine Service Hospital, tended to the various medical needs of over 250,000 immigrants and was considered one of the best in America. Continued expansions of the hospital and the related



.....
These hard to identify lumps of moldy material are rolls of toilet paper untouched for half a century.

wards—Islands 2 and 3 of Ellis Island—brought the Island to the 27.5 acres it is today) Measles were common and many spent weeks in measles wards. Those less fortunate remained in the contagious disease wards until deportation arrangements could be made. Others ended up in locked psychiatric

wards, many receiving shock therapy, which was then in its infancy. (Shock therapy continues to be a treatment alternative to this day in many of the best psychiatric hospitals.) The least fortunate, and there were many, ended up in the morgue, where their autopsies

Documenting Decay in Depth

Inside Ellis Island With Stereographers Schacker & Aronowitz

by Sheldon Aronowitz

This project was extremely challenging, on an emotional level as well as on a photographic level. Although we'd had a glimpse of the surroundings months earlier, it did not fully prepare us for our encounters as we went from building to building. Initially we were struck by the extremely long hallways. All the various rooms were dark, damp, and moldy. Daylight was the only source of light and therefore most areas were very dimly lit.

We were also amazed by the scope of the plant life that had made its way into the buildings. No room

escaped the elements entirely (due, in combination, to holes in roofs and walls from the natural deterioration as well as the broken windows from vandalism in the early years after the complex was abandoned). Some looked like indoor greenhouses. The elements also took their toll on the paint, leaving us surrounded by this foreboding mosaic on every wall, ceiling, door, etc. The conditions were damp and chilling. Then there were the pigeons who took up residence in many areas, as evidenced by accumulating guano.

.....
Stereographers Sheldon Aronowitz (left) and Gary Schacker outside an Ellis Island building. Stereo documentation of Unseen Ellis Island took place in April, 2003.



Although it was exhilarating being able to document such an important piece of American history, where so very few have been since 1954, it was at times eerie and depressing. None of the immigrants who were confined to the hospital and ward complex were there of their own volition. In the best of circumstances it is not easy to deal with a hospital stay—how much more so for these immigrants. It must have been quite frightening for them, despite the hospital being one of the best of its time and probably much better than any the immigrants would have experienced in their countries of origin. We could not help but feel the anguish and pain of the many thousands confined here. These emotions heightened in

served as instruction for the medical staff.

Fiorello LaGuardia, the famous mayor of New York City, worked as an interpreter on Ellis Island before he became mayor. He was a strong advocate for the immigrants and estimated that half of the immigrants who were sent home for mental problems were victims of cultural misunderstanding. One mental test consisted of the immigrants looking at a picture and describing to a psychologist what they saw. One immigrant described a picture of a boy burying his pet rabbit by saying, "the boy killed the rabbit for dinner", a common practice in his European community. He was deported for being "insane".

Every immigrant had to have \$25 in cash so that they could maintain themselves until they

found a job. It took months for most immigrants to save \$25, in addition to the other expenses they incurred to get to Ellis Island, and many did not have the money. After showing the inspector the \$25, an immigrant would often secretly hand it to the person in back of them and so on down the line.

Any Immigrants who were refused entry could appeal to the "Special Inquiry Board", but they were not allowed to have a lawyer. About 20 out of every hundred immigrants went before this Board of Inquiry. Amazingly, about 18 of these 20 won their cases, resulting in an overall deportation rate of only 2%! However, with up to five thousand immigrants coming into Ellis Island daily, (the record was 11,747 on April 7, 1907) this 2%

the operating rooms, where their fear of the unknown was probably at its highest, and again in the morgue and autopsy room.

We then had to deal with quite a different kind of emotion when witnessing the graffiti carved in wooden doors and scrawled on walls by the Nazi sympathizers confined at Ellis Island during World War II. We saw swastikas carved in doors and "long live Hitler" scrawled on the walls. Seeing this close up and first hand was chilling. But there was also uplifting graffiti, such as the drawing by a child on a wall in the measles ward. This child drew a picture of the *Leviathan*, the ship he and his family probably arrived on earlier, and where he probably contracted measles. He wrote and drew about an amusement park and his desire to go on the rides there. We could not help but wonder if his wish came true or if, sadly, his family was deported.

Then there were the concerns for our own health. The air quality was never checked and mold, pigeon guano, and fallen asbestos was everywhere. There were conflicting reports of precautions we should take, ranging from "don't worry" to warnings about the need for industrial quality face masks.

We also had to deal with our fair share of photographic problems and issues, as would be expected in such a project. We decided to shoot only in available light to portray the mood and conditions as accurately as possible. The problem was that there was not always that much available light and metering was difficult. Exposure calculations were complicated by hav-

ing to deal with reciprocity failure, requiring additional bracketing. Using small *f*-stops for greater depth of field sometimes required exposures of up to 1 minute.

There was no immediate feedback and there would be no second chance, so we bracketed heavily. Spending 30 minutes on a single shot was not uncommon, and our time was limited. Shooting for 10 hours a day wearing face masks and hard hats was no easy task. We also had to deal with the cold and the rain, "indoor rain!" Equipment consisted of twin synched Ricoh SLRs with variable interocular and a single camera on a slide bar. Images were taken with 19mm, 28mm, 40mm, and 50mm lenses. ☺☺

A child's drawing of the Leviathan on a wall of the Measles Ward.





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6188—The "East Side," New York, N. Y., U. S. A.

Keystone No. 5288, "The 'East Side', New York, N.Y. U.S.A." Tenement slums were the initial destination of many immigrants. collection of Louise Goldstein

translated into well over a thousand deportations a month.

For those detained, the wait could be weeks. Detainees were served three meals a day in the restaurants and cafeterias of Ellis Island. There was even a separate Kosher kitchen for observant Jews. The food was plentiful and nutritious, but often strange and unfamiliar. One young girl remembered the first time she ate a banana. Neither she nor any of the people she was with had ever seen a banana before. She ate it skin and all!

America has become the great, strong, and rich country it is largely to the efforts, sacrifice, and contributions of the immigrants. President Lincoln described immigrants as "a source of national wealth and strength." By 1920 New York City had more Italians than Rome, more Germans than Bremen, more

Irish than Dublin, and more Jews than Jerusalem! They built the skyscrapers, the roads, and the subway systems. Such notables as Albert Einstein, Alexander Graham Bell, Knute Rockney, Greta Garbo, Irving Berlin, Enrico Fermi, Bob Hope, Kahil Gibran, Frank Capra, Charles Atlas, Al Jolson, Edward G. Robinson, and thousands of other well known personalities made worthy contributions to America in their respective fields. So many things we take for granted, like log cabins, symphony orchestras, Santa Claus, bowling, and ice skating, are immigrant contributions.

Hundreds of foreign words like "yankee", "alligator", "phooey", "prairie", "jukebox", and "gung-ho" are now part of the English language. The immigrants came to make a better life for themselves and they made a better life for us all. There was a joke which was popular among the Italian immigrants: "I came to America because I heard that the streets were paved



Large windows completely broken out expose interior areas to vegetation and the elements.

Prior to the widespread use of air conditioning, these interior nurses dorm rooms in the administration building used screen doors to allow for air circulation and keep out pests.



Electro-convulsive therapy, which is still in use today, was employed at Ellis Island.



No need for potted plants - growth is spontaneous from crumbling and decaying floors.



with gold. When I got here I found out three things. First, the streets were not paved with gold. Second, they were not paved at all. Third, I was expected to pave them!" (Italians make up the largest immigrant group—over 2,500,000).

There is debate over whether some immigrant name changes are truth or rumor. It is clear that, in fact, some names were changed. According to some sources, immigration officials changed many Jewish names to Levine or Cohen. One immigrant reportedly told the inspector that he was a "yosem", meaning orphan in Yiddish, and his name was recorded as Josem. Often, when asked to state their names, many confused and nervous immigrants stated the names of their hometowns or former pro-

fessions instead, so a baker would become Mr. Baker. Some immigrants even changed their own names out of fear that a long or unpronounceable or ethnic sounding name would get them deported. Such a case was Irving Berlin, whose real name was Israel Beilin. Other reputable sources maintain that *any* name changes were made prior to arrival at Ellis Island, where officials went strictly by the immigrant's name as recorded on the ship's manifest.

Within a few years after World War I, Congress passed laws that severely limited the number of people allowed to enter the United States. Ellis Island's role changed from being solely an immigration processing center to also serving as a hospital for wounded servicemen



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Lush plant growth during the summer months is in stark contrast to the decaying structures.
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Cafeteria in the Baggage and Dormitory building now resembles a mini indoor forest thanks to broken skylights.
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.....
Long enclosed hallway running the length of Island Three connecting the eight Measles Wards (one seen here) and the three Isolation Wards.
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of both World Wars, a holding center for prisoners of war, a Coast Guard Training Station, and during World War II, a detention center for Japanese and German nationals suspected of ties to their own countries.

In November of 1954, the last enemy detainee, a merchant seaman named Arne Peterson, was released and Ellis Island officially closed.

The unused buildings began to decay and the weeds, pigeons, and elements took over. In 1965 President Johnson declared Ellis Island part of the Statue of Liberty National Monument under the jurisdiction of the National Park Service. In 1984 Ellis Island underwent major restoration—the

largest historic restoration in US history. At a cost of \$60,000,000 the main building was reopened to the public on September 10, 1990, as the Ellis Island Immigration Museum, receiving 2 million visitors annually. Islands 2 and 3, the "South Side" hospital and ward complex, as well as other buildings on Island one, remained in decay.

These long and once magnificent hallways of the vast hospital and ward complex, which were once scrubbed, polished and cleaned on a daily basis, are now in such condition that even walking in them could pose a health hazard! The main cafeteria looks more like an unkempt forest (see photo). Dirt, mold, asbestos, and animal droppings are but a few of

Rusted filing cabinets in the Measles Ward. Record keeping was a huge task at the entry port for 12 million immigrants.



Vandalism was a major problem in the 1950s and 60s after the abandonment of Ellis Island. Today there is constant high level security.



the hazards to watch out for—not to mention the instability of the structure itself. Where in these once bright hallways there were sounds of newborns crying, children playing, medical staff hustling and bustling about, and immigrants talking, singing, and joking around—these now dark, damp, and musty hallways, on the verge of collapse with vines and vegetation forcing their way into the every broken window and foundation crack—hold only the sounds of the wind whipping through the crevices rustling the ever present vegetation, the creaking sounds of your own footsteps, and the cooing of pigeons.

The immigrants' stories of their experiences, their families, and their hopes and dreams for a new and productive life have been replaced by stories of ghostly apparitions, sounds of gurneys rolling about, screams, and sensations of touch and cold, widely reported by much of the security staff who nightly patrol the hallways of these dank buildings. (The "lady in red" and her five children reportedly have made their middle of the night appearance on more than one occasion.)

This will soon change. In 1977 the National Trust for Historic Preservation added the "South

Side" complex to its "America's most Endangered Historic Places" list. The United States Congress along with the State of New Jersey and the National Park Service have appropriated \$8,600,000 for stabilization and restoration, with work already begun—but \$300,000,000 more is needed. This most important national treasure, to which over 40% of all Americans can trace their ancestry, and which has laid in decay for all these years, will someday be restored to its original magnificence and grandeur—and the sounds of tourists and school groups walking in the footsteps of their ancestors will be heard. 🏛️

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