

Background Information

Germans immigrated to the central and eastern parts of Galicia between 1782 and 1789 at the invitation of the Austrian Emperor Josef II. Primarily from southwestern Germany, the immigrants established colonies that flourished for the next century. In 1867 the government in Vienna had surrendered matters of domestic policy to the Poles and as a result, the German ethnic minority gradually lost the long established right to be educated in their own language. They experienced discrimination in government offices as well as in the courts. By the 1880s the area was densely populated and there were increasing restrictions on land purchases. The German culture and livelihood was being threatened. All of these factors may have influenced the decision of the Lorenz family to leave Galicia.

Peter Lorenz was the first member to leave his homeland arriving in New York City on December 20, 1905 aboard the S.S. Kaiser Wilhelm der Grosse. The passenger manifest indicates that he was en route to the home of his brother-in-law in Chicago Illinois. Undoubtedly, Peter's wages would help to finance his family's immigration. Fifteen more Lorenz family members arrived in New York City on April 5, 1908 aboard the S.S. Amerika. Joseph, Mary and their five children as well as the newly-married William and Mary, accompanied Peter's wife Magdalena and their four children. Catherine Lorenz, a widow since 1883 may have had no choice but to travel with her three sons.

Slightly different information can be obtained from the Passenger Manifests completed in New York as compared to the one completed in Hamburg. The New York Manifest records the limited funds that each family was declaring: Magdalena - \$50.00, William - \$25.00, Joseph - \$90.00 and Catherine - \$20.00. It is however more general as to the place of origin. The list prepared in Hamburg is specific about their town of origin, Rachin. There is an age discrepancy for Catherine between the two records with the Hamburg list being more likely to be accurate.

Following their arrival in New York, the families traveled by train and finally by oxcart to complete their five thousand mile journey. The Lorenz family began life in their new homeland.

The Ellis Island Experience

When they landed, the immigrants had numbered tags pinned to their clothing that corresponded to the manifest page and line number on which their names appeared. Immigration inspectors used this system to verify the immigrants right to land.

Undoubtedly confused by instructions in a “foreign” language and overwhelmed by the sheer numbers awaiting the same processing, the new arrivals joined the line starting at the dock and continuing up the steep flight of stairs to the Registry Room. There Public Health doctors had a few seconds to examine each immigrant for a variety of disease including cholera, tuberculosis and epilepsy. Immigrants who appeared to be sick or who were determined to have a contagious disease were marked with blue chalk and detained for further medical examination. Immigrants with incurable or disabling ailments were returned to their point of departure.

The immigrants who passed through the medical inspection slowly made their way to the end of the Registry Room to confront the legal inspectors. Amid the chaos of many languages being spoken at once, the immigrants were asked their age, occupation, marital status, and destination. The inspectors determined the social, economic and moral fitness of the immigrant by his answers.

Although each immigrant spent only a few moments being examined and questioned, the inspection process at Ellis Island averaged five hours.