

Yarixa Vega

Graceland Park O'Donnell Heights Elementary/Middle School

## History of Immigrant Quarantines in Baltimore

Baltimore was one of the largest ports of immigration in the mid 1800s. People from all over Europe escaped poor conditions and came to America. Once they arrived in America, they had another set of obstacles to face in order to enter the country. Those obstacles often included staying in a quarantine hospital. Like Ellis Island in New York City, Baltimore had a quarantine hospital. The procedure you had to go through was also very similar to Ellis Island.

Immigrants from many countries such as France, Germany (1720), Ireland (mid-1800's) and many more, came to Baltimore to escape horrible conditions in their home countries. Germans and the Irish that came to Baltimore, escaped political oppression, religious persecution, and poor economic conditions. Also, many French fleeing the French Revolution were seeking refuge in Baltimore. Due to the growth of the city's population and the increase in sickness, Baltimore established the Health Department in 1793. This department helped control the spread of the disease throughout the city.

When immigrants arrived in the country, they were asked multiple legal questions before they could step on American soil. Most of the time, a lot of immigrants were detained for medical reasons, but sometimes they didn't have the money to settle, or they didn't have family or friends to meet them. Most immigrants on ships were either on first, second, or third class. First and second class usually didn't have to go through inspection unless they had medical or legal problems. They only had to go through a quick inspection while still aboard the ship. Third class, however, had to go through a long and tiring inspection. They also needed forms of documentation of their family and themselves. But it wasn't until 1884, then President Chester Arthur allowed the government to quarantine people entering the United States to prevent the spread of different diseases.

The process of being quarantined in Baltimore was a lot like Ellis Island. The people that were sent for a medical examination were sent to a small room and stripped of their clothes. Then the doctor examined them and determined if they were sick. If the doctor decided that the person was sick, they had to stay in the quarantine hospital. While in the hospital, they were given clothes that belonged to the hospital. In the

quarantine, they had to sleep in dormitories that could hold up to 60 patients. But, since there were so many people most were forced to share beds. "In the dormitories there are so many fights for the sleeping cots, that we tremble with fear, because if two persons get to the cot at the same time, one says this is mine and the other one no it's mine until they start beating each other." said Gabriel Tarriño, an immigrant from Spain. Patients were given 3 meals per day and only 10 minutes of outside time. At least they had a library through the day for entertainment.

About 20% of immigrants were held for medical examination, but fortunately only 2% of the immigrants were sent to be deported back to their original country. There were lots of rules that went along with deporting immigrants. If an immigrant child was age 12 or older and didn't pass the medical exam, he or she was deported alone. If a child was under the age of 12 and had a contagious disease, he or she was also deported, but had to be accompanied by one parent. If a single parent came to America with 3 children, all under the age of 12. But one child was sick, then the other 2 would have to stay with family already in America or they would have to go back to their country with their parent. Having to go back to the country your trying to escape from was very stressful and heart breaking for many immigrants

In conclusion, immigrants from all over Europe and other places came to America to escape poor living conditions for a better life. Baltimore, being one of the many huge ports in America for immigrants to come into this land. Although there was a very long and exhausting process, many were still able to come in and have an opportunity to start over. The quarantine hospital was just a part of the process and a tough one for entering the US from the port of Baltimore. It wasn't for immigration through the port, Baltimore wouldn't have grown as fast and as much as it did and if it wasn't for the quarantine, diseases would have killed everyone.