

Voyage to America

For many in the 1800s, the voyage to America was one of excitement mixed with anxiety, boredom, and seasickness. Prior to the 1800s, vessels sailed between Europe and America only when a freight ship was full. Because of this, people immigrating to America often had to wait to board a ship once it was full of cargo—they weren't really able to plan their crossing of the Atlantic. In the 1800s, though, the idea of sailing on a schedule was introduced, and that had a positive impact on the American economy. People could now plan when they would sail, and that increased the number of people who wanted to immigrate to the United States.

In the 1800s, immigrants sailed on freight ships to America. One particular type of freight ship was called a packet ship. Packet ships carried mail, cargo, and people. Travelers who had enough money might have been able to purchase a cabin for the ocean crossing. Most of the travelers were poor immigrants, though, and they could only afford bunks in the steerage. The steerage was also known as the *'tween deck*, because it was located between the cabins and the hold.

As more people from Europe looked to immigrate to America, the business of transporting people became more lucrative. Many ships started to focus on transporting people in addition to freight. One ship, the *Shenandoah*, traveled to and from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and Liverpool, England, from 1840 until 1854. Its typical capacity was approximately 230 passengers—all but a few were farmers, clerks, and laborers from England and Ireland.

Liverpool was the main port of departure for people wishing to emigrate from Britain, Norway, and Sweden. Other Europeans embarked from ports near Le Havre, France; Bremen and Hamburg, Germany; and Antwerp, Belgium. Surprisingly, the voyage across the ocean, despite its drawbacks, was the easiest part of the trip for many Europeans. Many left their homes and had to travel a long way to even get to the port. They traveled by train, wagon, donkey, and even by foot. Some traveled alone, even those in their teens. They stayed in boardinghouses, or camped along the road. They had to worry about weather, thieves, and unexpected expenses.

Scandinavian Americans

Settlers from the Scandinavian countries of Norway, Finland, Sweden, and Denmark brought a very rich culture to America, including a deep religious tradition, a distinctive cuisine, and a strong literary and linguistic tradition. As they spread out into the Great Lakes states and the northern Great Plains, they established communities that mirrored what they had left at home. These new enclaves looked, sounded, and smelled just like Scandinavian villages.

The Scandinavians were generally Lutherans. The Lutheran Church required that all children learn to read and write. Because of this focus on literacy and education, the Scandinavian immigrants arrived in America literate in their native languages and more capable of adjusting to or learning new skills. They set up newspapers and publishing houses soon after establishing their communities. Scandinavian authors were writing for these newspapers, as well as for magazines, and publishing their own books. As a result, bookstores popped up as well. Another result of their prominent literacy was the establishment of schools (primary and secondary, as well as institutions of higher education). These schools were funded and supported by the Church.

Scandinavian communities were socially active, meaning there was a strong sense of community, of helping each other, of brotherhood and camaraderie, and of providing welfare for those in need. They had social clubs, community centers, cooking clubs, sports teams, social and financial aid programs, and collectively owned businesses, or cooperatives. These were popular back home, and they served a great function in the new country. As individuals, families, and neighborhoods worked to get settled and find ways to prosper, joining with others to farm and produce was a great solution. Cooperatively owned farms, dairies, and stores were commonplace in the Scandinavian settlements of the upper Midwest.

This focus on helping others carried over into the Scandinavian immigrant's interest in social activism. Many Scandinavian immigrants took active roles in American social reform movements. They took lead roles in the movement to abolish slavery, they volunteered in great numbers to fight for the Union in the Civil War, and they took a great interest in supporting laborers, miners, and loggers, striking against what they believed to be unfair labor practices.

German Americans

The earliest German immigrants landed in America in 1608 and were part of the settlement of Jamestown. In 1626, Peter Minuit, a German, came to New Netherland to serve as the director of the Dutch colony and later was governor of the Swedish colony in Delaware. The first major German settlement was Germantown, Pennsylvania. It was settled by German Mennonites, who came to America in 1683 seeking religious freedom. In the 1700s, other religious German groups traveled to America to establish communities to practice their religion without persecution. These groups mostly settled in Pennsylvania. By 1790, up to one hundred thousand Germans had immigrated to America, accounting for approximately 8.6 percent of the total U.S. population. In Pennsylvania, they made up approximately 33 percent of the population.

In the 1600s and 1700s, Germans made a huge impact on the history of the United States. German settlers designed and built the Conestoga wagon, which was used to transport agricultural products from farms to cities. German newspapers and publishing houses popped up in the colonies, and a German printer was the first to print a Bible in America in 1742. Another German became inspector general of the Continental Army. The most famous German to arrive in America in the 1700s, though, was John Jacob Astor. He arrived in 1784 with \$25 in his pocket. Astor became a real estate magnate and a fur trader; at the time of his death, he was the richest man in the country, worth \$20 million.

German immigrants, like other European immigrants, brought their rich and unique culture with them. Their custom of decorating a tree at Christmastime was introduced in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, in 1821. America's Santa Claus was popularized by German immigrants, along with the Easter bunny and Easter eggs. It was a German immigrant who established the first kindergarten in America in Watertown, Wisconsin. And it was a German, Adolphus Busch, who settled in St. Louis, Missouri, married the daughter of a brewer, and, along with his father-in-law and son, founded the Anheuser-Busch Brewing Association.

St. Louis was home to a very large German community. In 1860, there were seven German-language newspapers. Some of the immigrants who read these newspapers were part of the estimated 1.3 million German-born immigrants who resided in the United States. German communities also multiplied in Texas, thanks in part to Prince Carl of Solms-Braunfels. In 1844, he sailed to America with 150 other families. They founded New Braunfels, Texas. In 1872, thousands of German farmers lost their farming privileges in Russia and they immigrated to America. These Russian Germans chose to continue their farming livelihood in Nebraska, Colorado, and the Dakotas. It was in the 1880s, though, when the largest

wave of German immigration occurred. Nearly 1.5 million left Germany during that decade—and an astounding 250,000 just in 1882 alone. Another big migration of German immigrants occurred during the 1930s with the rise of Adolf Hitler. Notable Germans—scientists, musicians, scholars, and artists, including Albert Einstein—came to America to escape persecution during this time.

Irish Americans

The Irish immigrants who came to America had a different background than the Germans and the Scandinavians. The Irish came from rural, often unindustrialized areas. They were all too familiar with disease, social problems, and living in destitute conditions. When they came to America, they gravitated toward the less desirable parts of the big cities, as they typically couldn't afford anything better.

Because they were, for the most part, unskilled laborers, they entered the American workforce at the bottom of the job pool. They took on the jobs that others didn't want. They became coal miners, railroad builders, and canal constructors. Irish women became servants and housekeepers. The increasing number of Irish immigrants caused intense competition for these less desirable jobs. Business owners took advantage of Irish immigrants and readily fired any workers who complained or weren't cooperative. The owners knew they could find another Irish worker who was willing to work for low pay, or do tasks that could easily be considered inhumane.

In addition to being discriminated against at work, many Irish were discriminated against because of their religion. Protestants and Catholics had clashed for centuries in Europe, and these tensions continued in America. Protestant mobs attacked Irish immigrants verbally and physically, and destroyed their property.

The Irish fought back. They used their brawn, as well as combined power from the sheer number of them, to organize into a powerful political force. They wanted power in the hands of the working class. They believed in loyalty to the individual. The Irish political machines made the most impact in major American cities in the 1900s. There was corruption among the powerful men organizing these political forces, but the Irish influence did a lot of good. They made it possible for Irish workers to get and keep jobs, helped Irish immigrants become naturalized citizens, and created and promoted social services to take care of their supporters.

The Orphan Train

Between 1854 and 1929, 250,000 orphan infants and children were sent from the overcrowded big cities of the East Coast to areas out west to be adopted. Many of the children were abandoned by their immigrant parents, who were unable to care for them. It was not unusual to find babies left on the doorstep of a church, with a note attached asking for help—a note like this: "Dear Sisters, By the love of God be so kind as to take this poor orphan child and if she should die, please to bury her for me and I will be very happy. . . . I can't afford to bury her." It was not unusual to find filthy, unkempt children running in the streets of New York City, homeless and without anyone watching out for them.

It was a young Presbyterian minister, Charles Loring Brace, who recognized this devastating social issue. He had arrived in New York in 1849. He had hopes of making a difference by evangelizing the poor and doing good in the world. He had an intended audience: the youth of America. He started with "boys meetings," at which he provided food and Bible study to young men. He realized, though, that he needed to do more when he saw that these young men would go right back out on the streets. Brace

decided that something else was needed to give meaning and purpose to the lives of these youths. Brace proposed a solution. These children needed education and the opportunity to learn a trade. "There is no doubt that a lad with a trade feels a peculiar independence of the world and is much less likely to take up dishonest means of living." There was only one problem. He could not put these young boys to work in the cities. The labor unions wouldn't allow it.

So, Brace created the Children's Aid Society in 1853. It was his hope that this organization would find work for these youths outside of the cities, in the country, out west where new settlements were sprouting up all over. His idea included sending the youths on trains to these communities and advertising them as laborers, with the hope that families would in turn feed, clothe, and educate them. It was a foster care agency and an employment agency all bundled into one. It was a bold move, but it was effective. Towns out west such as Maryville, Kansas, requested that the train visit again and again. At one point, there were 150 families in Maryville wanting to adopt. Some wanted ten to fifteen children. The Children's Aid Society did not send children out without making sure there was some assurance that the children would be taken care of and considered part of the family. The society sent representatives out to visit the children with their new families, and children were expected to write letters to the society twice a year to check in.

The orphan train experience was difficult for many children. Some had to be split from siblings. Some were sent directly from their birth parents. Some didn't fit in with their new families and new communities because of their backgrounds. But many ended up with loving and caring families. Many were grateful for the chance to have a new life.