

ELLIS ISLAND

Ellis Island was established as the first Federal *immigration* station by President Benjamin Harrison in 1890. Between 1892 and 1924 it operated as the United States' largest immigration center, where more than 12 million foreigners entered the country. Before Ellis Island, all immigrants were processed by each individual state.

Today, the buildings of Ellis Island still stand in New York harbor, just off the New Jersey coast. But the original land of the island was quite small—just 3.3 acres. Before it was an immigration center, the island was known as Oyster Island due to the rich and plentiful oyster beds that it had. It was used as a hanging site for pirates, a harbor fort, and an ammunition depot, until a man named Samuel Ellis became the private owner of the island in 1770. Then it was bought by the government in 1808, to be used as a *fortification* and harbor defense site. After it became an immigration station, the island was expanded with man-made extensions, using excess dirt and landfill that came from the *excavation* of New York City subway tunnels. It is now 27.5 acres.



Ellis Island



Ellis Island 1900

Vocabulary

Immigration: the movement of non-native people to a new country in order to settle there.

Fortification: the act of strengthening; a place of military defense

Excavation: to remove soil by digging it out; to make hollow

Trivia!

1. Who was the first immigrant to be processed at Ellis Island?
2. What happened to the immigration building on June 14, 1897?
3. Why did Ellis Island end up closing?

1. Annie Moore, a 15 year old Irish girl. 2. There was a fire that burned the whole station to the ground. It was re-built and re-opened in 1900. 3. After WWI the U.S. emerged as a potential world power, and embassies were set up around the globe so that immigrants could process their papers at the U.S. embassy in their home country. It was not used anymore, except to detain refugees or people who had problems with their paperwork. Today it is still closed to the public.