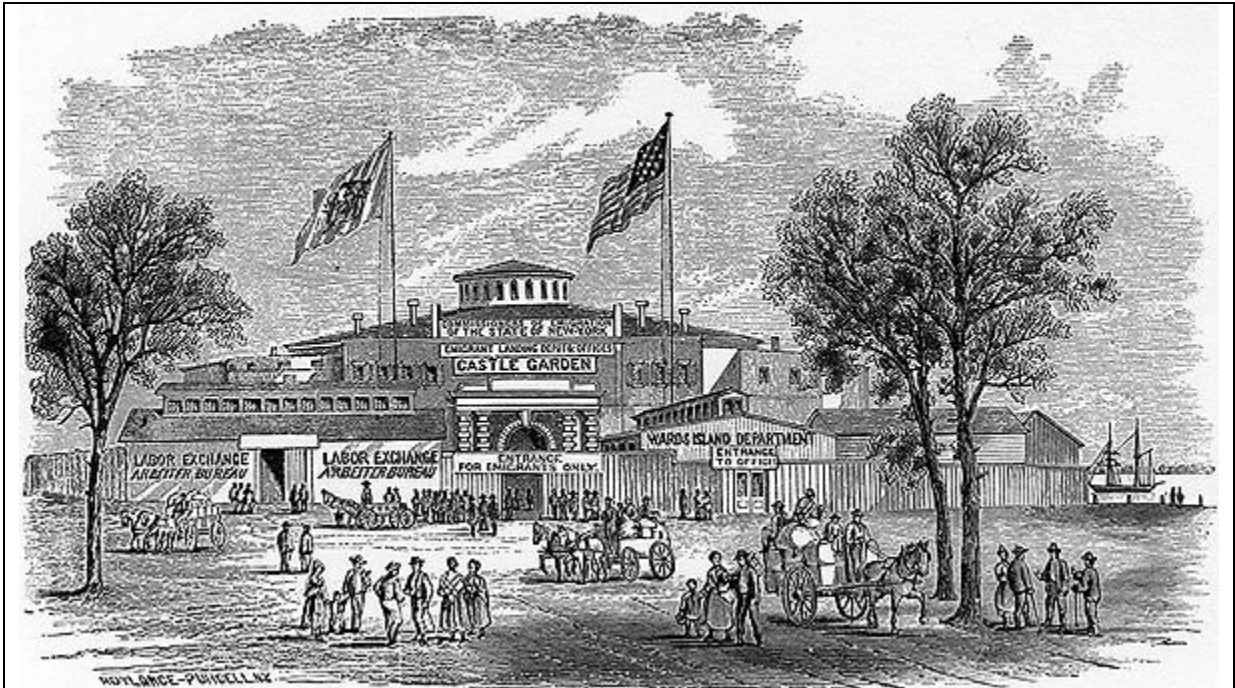


Castle Garden

Compiled by Marian Burmester (gathered in 2002-2003)



State Emigrant Landing Depot, Castle Garden, New York, from *Immigration and the Commissioners of Emigration*, by Fredrich Kapp (New York: Arno Press and the New York Times, 1969 [originals ca. early 1880's]). Note the sign marking the entrance to the Ward's Island Department.

Most of our ancestors arrived in America prior to Ellis Island, which became the immigration station in 1892. Castle Garden welcomed some eight million immigrants between 1855 and 1890, six million of whom were German or Irish.

At the lower tip of Manhattan there was once an island that was eventually joined to the mainland by landfill. Castle Garden is a product of the Napoleonic era. The conflict between France and Great Britain plus the English policy of seizing American ships and impressing American seamen into the British Navy produced months of tension. The climax came on June 22, 1807, with the British attack upon the American frigate Chesapeake. In New York, mass meetings denounced the attack. At the same time, a great "fortification fever" swept the city of New York, which was virtually defenseless except for Fort Columbus on Governors Island. In short order five new forts were built: Fort Wood on Bedloes Island, Fort Gibson on Ellis Island, three-tiered Castle Williams on Governors Island, the South-west Battery at the tip of Manhattan Island, and the North Battery at the foot of Hubert Street.

Between 1807 and 1811 a circular fort known as the Southwest Battery was built here by the federal government in preparation for the coming war with England. Circular in shape, the South-west Battery stood in about 7.7 meters (35 feet) of water, 61 meters (200 feet) from shore. A timber causeway with drawbridge connected the new fort to

Manhattan. The South-west Battery had 28 guns on one tier. Inside the rounded ends of the rear wall, on the landside, were the magazines. Quarters for the officers were at each side of the passageway to the causeway. No barracks for the enlisted men existed

The South-west Battery was completed in 1811 and fired its first salute on Evacuation Day November 25, the 28th anniversary of the departure of the British from New York at the close of the American Revolution. Throughout the War of 1812 the fort stood ready, but its guns fired at nothing more dangerous than a harmless hulk moored in the river for target practice.

At the end of the war, the fort became the headquarters for the Third Military District and was named Castle Clinton in honor of DeWitt Clinton, a former mayor of New York City and later governor of New York State. In 1821 the district headquarters were moved to Governors Island and Castle Clinton was closed down. Two years later, Castle Clinton was ceded to New York City.

"The waters of our bay, the Narrows, the Hudson and interesting landscapes are in full view, with all the bustle of our floating commerce..."

--description of vista from the walkway atop Castle Clinton as it appeared in the *New York Gazette and General Advertiser*, July 3, 1824

Dubbed Castle Garden because of the new flowers and shrubs that graced the grounds, the fort was repurposed into a place for entertainment, including concerts and fireworks. A newspaper described the interior as a "fanciful garden, tastefully ornamented with shrubs and flowers." In time, a great fountain was installed.

In 1839, two entrepreneurs, Philip French and Christopher Heiser, leased the site to implement their vision: turn Castle Garden into a grand, large-scale entertainment center. The gunrooms, decorated with marble busts and painted panoramas, became a promenade and, from boxes seating eight people, a place from which to watch the show. A more popular promenade was the top of the Garden wall, where awnings covered a 4.2-meter (14-foot) walkway. The officers' quarters became a bar selling choice liquors, confections, and ices. They installed a stage and new floor in a room that would now hold 6,000 seats arranged in a huge semi-circle.

And they were successful: under their management, Castle Garden became a renowned amusement hall and opera house. From the start, Castle Garden witnessed extraordinary events. Within a month after its opening, the Marquis de Lafayette landed here at the start of a yearlong triumphal tour of America. In the years that followed, many other prominent people were honored at the Garden: Presidents Andrew Jackson, John Tyler, and James K. Polk, Vice President Richard M. Johnson, Sen. Henry Clay, and the great Hungarian patriot Louis Kossuth. A memorable event occurred September 11, 1850, when P. T. Barnum presented the "Swedish Nightingale," Jenny Lind, in her American debut. More than 6,000 people paid at least \$3 a seat. At the close of her performance, the

audience broke into a "tempest of cheers." But fortuitously, French and Heiser's lease expired in 1854, opening the door for Castle Garden to take on yet another purpose.

While New Yorkers were coming to Castle Garden to see light operas and ballets among other forms of entertainment, the Commissioners of Emigration were faced with the growing challenge of handling thousands of immigrants each week at New York Harbor. With no time to erect a new building, they leased Castle Garden, much to the horror of the local residents.

Prior to Castle Garden ships discharged their passengers at dock covering three to four miles of the East and Hudson River banks on Manhattan. Because of the size of this area it was difficult to provide adequate protection for the newly arrived immigrants who were being fleeced and robbed of their personal possessions. The boarding house runners were the worst of the thieves. They tried to lure immigrants in decrepit lodgings where they charged huge rates. If an immigrant resisted the pitch too long, the runner would seize something of value, a baby or a pretty daughter's wrist and take off through the crowd. The immigrant family would be forced to follow. Once at the boarding house, they would also be charged outrageous rates for transporting and storing their baggage. If the immigrant could not or would not pay, they were turned penniless into the street while their possessions were held a security.

The German and Irish Emigrant societies were established by some of the very earliest immigrants to protect newcomers of their nationality. These two organizations convinced the New York State Legislature to create a Board of Commissioners of Emigration in 1847. Members of the German and Irish Emigrant Societies along with state and city politicians served on the new board. The board quickly established the Emigrants hospital and Refuge on Wards Island. After the revolution of 1848 in Europe, the number of immigrants began to increase with a corresponding increase in problems when the new immigrants landed on the streets of New York City. The Commissioners of Emigration and the ethnic societies decided that the time had come to establish a single receiving station where incoming immigrants could be properly inspected and protected from the thieves. The lease for the Castle Garden entertainment complex expired on 1854. Over strenuous objections from citizens in the neighborhood who were concerned that newly arrived immigrants would reduce their property values in April 1855 the New York State Legislature authorized the Commissioners of Emigration to establish the immigrant receiving station at Castle Garden.

On August 1, 1855, Castle Garden opened its doors as America's first receiving station for immigrants. There were no traces of the entertainment center it had once been. Refreshment rooms were replaced by bathrooms; long wooden benches replaced the seats so immigrants could find the desks marked Registry, General Information, Exchange Office and Railroad Department. The stage was also gone; now an iron staircase was in its place leading to the Office of Commissioners of Emigration, General Agent and Superintendent.

Both sailing and steam ships entered the New York harbor through the Narrows, the passageway between Staten Island and Brooklyn. Ships were then required to anchor at quarantine near the Staten Island shore. The local authorities always had a concern of the danger that shiploads of unwashed and unhealthy immigrants might carry smallpox, typhoid fever or cholera into the streets of the city. Quarantine was the screening process used to reduce this threat.

With a ship anchored at quarantine, Castle Garden officials started their process. In 1867, the operating procedures were organized into the following departments.

1. Boarding

As the immigrants clustered on the deck of the ship at quarantine, an official health inspector scanned them quickly for signs of contagious illnesses and examined the ship's records for details of deaths at sea. The ship was then allowed to proceed up the bay and anchor near Castle Garden.

2. Landing

After a customs inspector checked their luggage, the immigrants, accompanied by a landing agent, were taken from the vessel in barges and tugs to the Castle Garden pier. On landing, the immigrants were examined by a medical officer to determine if the health inspector might have missed any sick at quarantine. Steamer transferred sick immigrants to the hospital on Ward's Island, which is located in the East River between the upper portion of Queens and Manhattan Island. Following this examination the immigrants were taken into the rotunda, a large circular space situated in the center of the depot, which had separate compartments depending on whether the immigrant did or did not speak English for registration.

3. Registration

The name, nationality, former residence and intended destination were recorded for each immigrant.

4. Agents of the Railroad Companies

After registration, immigrants were directed to this agency where they could purchase tickets to their destinations without danger of being defrauded or subjected to extortion, which frequently happened outside Castle Garden.

5. City Baggage Delivery

Those immigrants who chose to stay in New York City or the vicinity arranged for delivery of their baggage in this department.

6. Exchange Brokers

Immigrants possessing gold or silver could have it exchanged here for U.S. currency by three exchange brokers who were closely supervised by the Commissioners of Emigration.

7. Information

At this point in the process, the immigrants were assembled in the rotunda and those who had friends waiting for them at the entrance to Castle Garden were notified and directed to them. Those who had letters of funds waiting for them were likewise notified.

8. Letter Writing

This department included clerks versed in foreign languages who assisted immigrants wishing to communicate with someone at a distance. While waiting for a reply, and if destitute, such immigrants could find a temporary home in the institutions at Ward's Island.

9. Boardinghouse Keepers

Boarding house keepers who were properly licensed by the city and certified to be responsible people were allowed in the rotunda to solicit immigrants who planned to stay in New York City for some time. To protect immigrants from the earlier abuses, the boardinghouses were regulated and closely supervised.

10. Forwarding

This department handled letters and funds sent to immigrants prior to arrival.

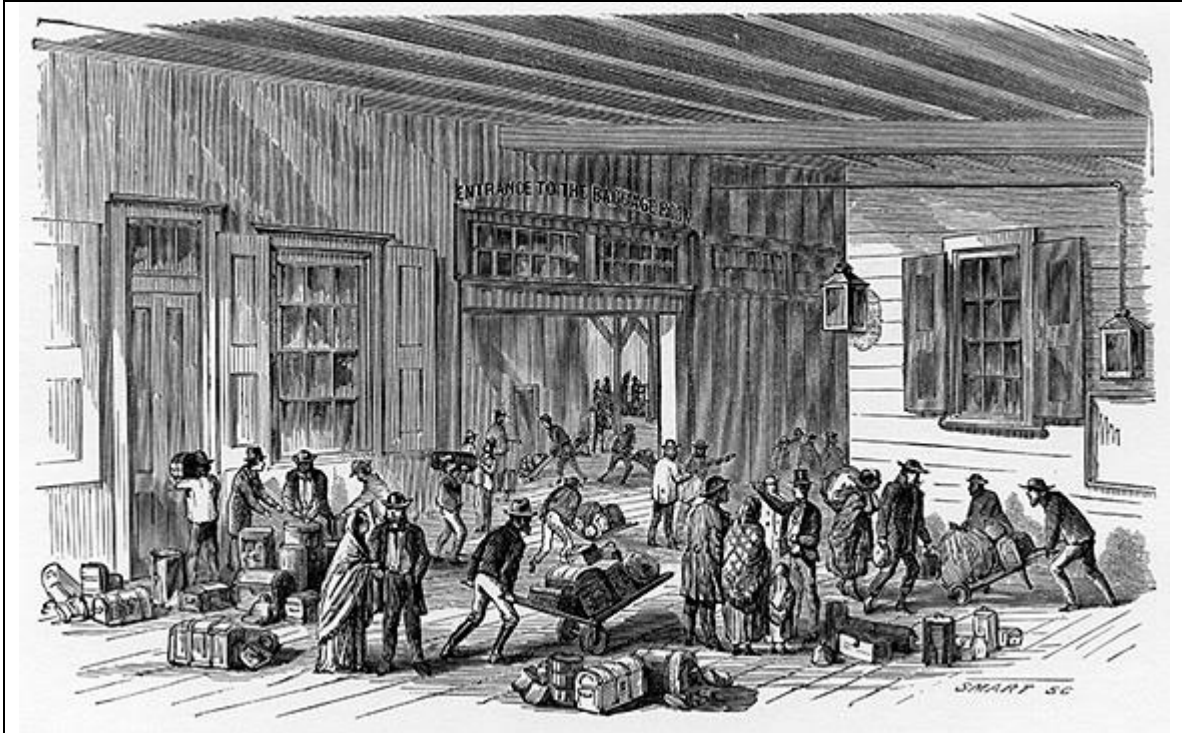
11. Wards Island

Applications for admission to the institutions on Ward's Island, determining applicant eligibility for admission, and maintaining records of admission and discharge were handled here. Two physicians here examined sick and destitute immigrants applying for relief.

12. Labor Exchange

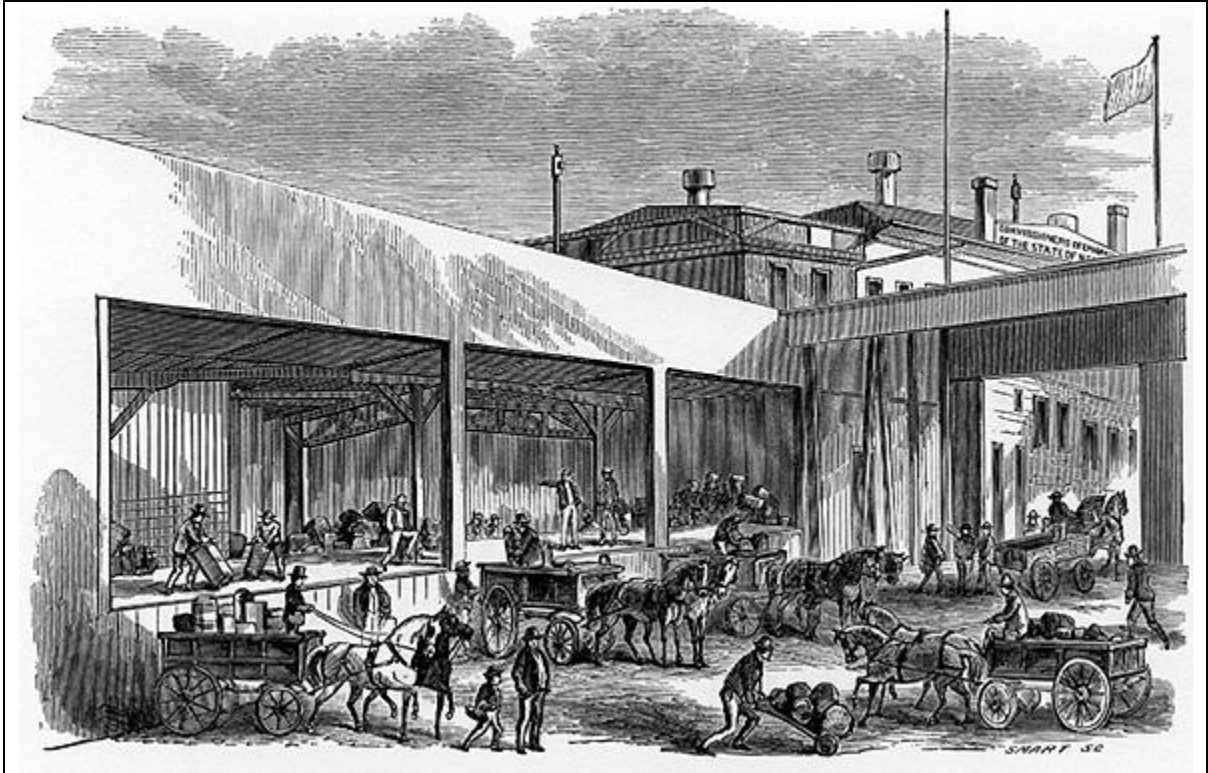
The Labor Exchange was established in 1868 and a new building, 80 by 52 feet, was erected adjacent to the main Castle Garden structure. The purpose of the Labor Exchange was to assist immigrants in securing employment at no charge.

Although the changes significantly improved the lot of the new immigrant, arriving in New York was still a frightening and dangerous experience. While the commissioners banned the thieves and undesirables from Castle Garden, they were still outside the gates ready to take advantage of the unwary.



Castle Garden Baggage Room: Receiving and Storing Luggage of Arriving Emigrants, from *Immigration and the Commissioners of Emigration*, by Fredrich Kapp (New York: Arno Press and the New York Times, 1969 [originals ca. early 1880's]).

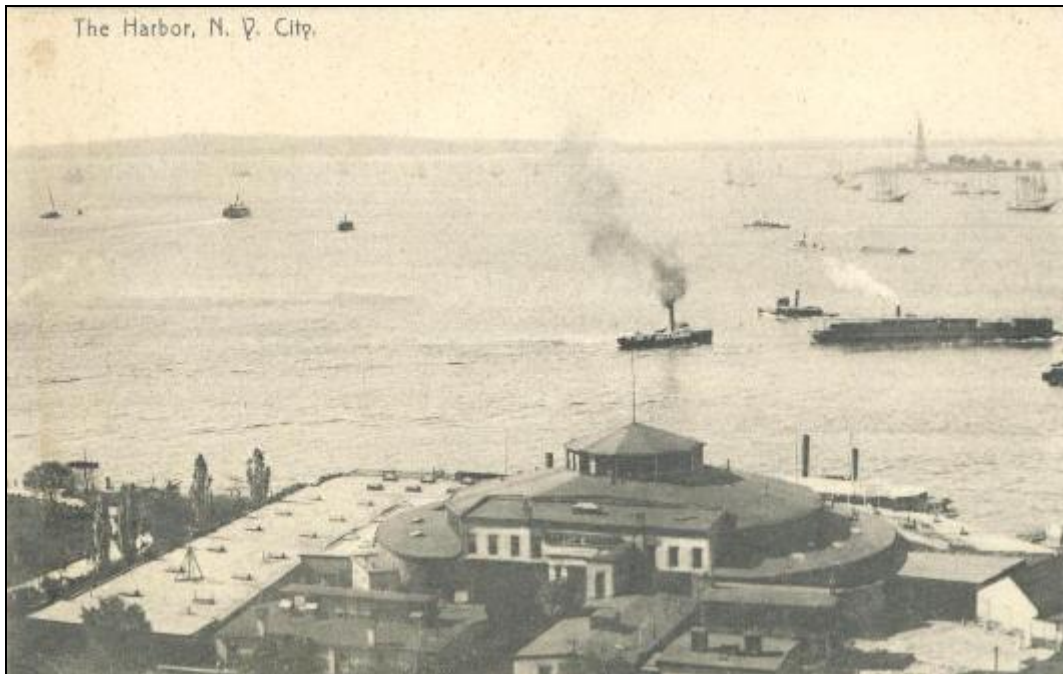
Compared to earlier immigrants arriving in New York, those who were received at Castle Garden had a much more pleasant experience. For the first time, due to the enclosure, immigrants had some sort of protection from the unsavory characters laying in wait. Said a *New York Times* article in 1874, "Castle Garden is so well known in Europe that few emigrants can be induced to sail for any other destination. Their friends in this country write to those who are intending to emigrate to come to Castle Garden where they will be safe, and if out of money, they can remain until it is sent to them. Complaints are frequently received by the commissioner from emigrants who have been landing at Halifax or Boston, though they were promised to be brought to New York."



Castle Garden Baggage Room: Discharging Emigrant Luggage for City Delivery, from *Immigration and the Commissioners of Emigration*, by Fredrich Kapp (New York: Arno Press and the New York Times, 1969 [originals ca. early 1880's]).

New federal legislation passed in 1855 helped immigrants on board ships. There were now new rules governing how much space a passenger was allowed, the proportion of passengers to tonnage, degree of cleanliness, ventilation, and food and cooking provisions. Each ship was now required to supply a complete manifest of passengers to the local customs officials, eventually making its way to the federal government.

Coming to America was still no easy journey. Old sailing ships were still in use, which made it virtually impossible to calculate the number of weeks it would take to make the crossing. Passengers complained of their ship conditions and death was not unheard of.



The Commissioners of Emigration weren't having an easy time either. Their concern was financing, as they fell deeply into debt as a result of an 1875 Supreme Court decision, declaring a New York law that required ships to post a bond or else pay a tax on each immigrant unconstitutional.

Disaster struck in 1876 when fire broke out in Castle Garden. Only the old fort walls and a few outer buildings remained. Reconstruction began two months later, despite the attacks of critics who wanted the site to revert back to its former elegance as a park. In a few more months, ships were welcomed once again.

The massive wave of immigration began in 1880's. In 1881, more than 45,000 people passed through Castle Garden, a number that was double the average annual rate in the past. During the 1880's, almost 70 percent of all immigrants to America were received at Castle Garden and more buildings were erected outside the Garden. Brick walls replaced the wooden fences.

From 1880 to 1890, nearly four million immigrants came to New York. Castle Garden was functioning well beyond its capacity. Complaints to the commissioners were constant, even from New York governor Grover Cleveland. Washington investigated and through an 1887 inquiry and their own explorations found that the facilities were indeed inadequate. Castle Garden's operations were called "a perfect farce."

Combined with similar difficulties encountered at other ports of entry. The Secretary of the Treasury recommended that the federal government take over all immigration. The government's contact with New York's Commissioners of Emigration was terminated on April 18, 1890. On that day, the last immigrants from the steamers *Bohemia* and *State of Indiana* were processed at Castle Garden. The center closed its doors.



The Barge Office
Temporary Immigration Station, circa 1890

The immigration center moved to Ellis Island, already owned by the government, which began its new role in 1892.



Original Ellis Island Immigration Station
circa 1892

From 1896 to 1941 Castle Garden again served the public needs of the city. Castle Garden was once again altered, this time to become the New York City Aquarium. When the Aquarium opened its doors on December 10, 1896, some 30,000 people poured in to see the specimens that came from the waters around New York. As the Aquarium became more popular and developed admiring friends, ship captains and yachtsmen based in New York began to collect interesting and more exotic fish from around the world for the Aquarium. Thus the collection grew in number and variety. Many of the aquatic creatures became quite well known with the crowds. A West India harbor seal that swam effortlessly around her tank seemed to take particular delight in the audiences that she

attracted and gleefully sprayed with a mouthful of water. For the millions of visitors the fun came to an end in 1941 when the doors were closed for good. The sea creatures were taken to the Bronx Zoo and later to Coney Island. The plan for the Brooklyn-Battery Tunnel was firm and the Aquarium stood in the way. It was an old structure that seemed to have outlived its usefulness. Powerful voices called for its demolition. A group of citizens, intrigued by the structure's history and unwilling to believe that simply because it was old, it was useless, fought to save the building. Gaining the ally of time when the United States entered World War II, they saw their efforts rewarded when Congress declared the historic structure Castle Clinton National Monument August 12, 1946. The new tunnel would be completed and the old fortress would remain. But before the building had received congressional protection, the wrecker's ball had already removed the upper story, roof, and other additions that had been added in its middle years. What was left when the National Park Service took over was the basic structure that had begun life back in the early 19th century. In the summer of 1975, after much restoration work, Castle Clinton reopened the doors that had been shut for 34 years.



View of Castle Garden emigration station, from the Annual Report of the [New York] Commissioners of Emigration, 1871-72.

After WWII the park was remodeled; and Castle Clinton became a national monument in 1950. The park is also home to a statue of Giovanni da Verrazano, the first European to enter New York Harbor. Tour boats to Liberty Island and Ellis Island leave from the park



Castle Clinton National Monument

August 12, 1946

More than a dozen forts were built to defend New York Harbor at the time of the War of 1812. The Southwest Battery was constructed on the rocks off the tip of Manhattan Island between 1808 and 1811. Although fully armed and staffed, the fort never had occasion to fire upon an enemy. In 1817, the fort was renamed Castle Clinton in honor of DeWitt Clinton, Mayor of New York City. The army vacated the fort in 1821 and the structure was deeded to New York City in 1823. In the summer of 1824, a new restaurant and entertainment center opened at the site, now called Castle Garden. A roof was added in the 1840s and Castle Garden served as an opera house and theater until 1854. It enjoyed a moment of supreme glory in 1850 as the site of the P.T. Barnum-promoted American debut of the Swedish soprano Jenny Lind.

On August 3, 1855, Castle Garden, now leased to New York State, opened as an immigrant-landing depot.

During the next 34 years, over 8 million people entered the United States through Castle Garden, until it was closed on April 18, 1890. The building was altered once again and reopened as the New York City Aquarium on December 10, 1896. It was one of the city's most popular attractions until it closed in 1941.



Ellis Island, circa 1935

Info taken from the following:

Family Chronicle Magazine – January/February 2000

<http://www.theshipslist.com/>

http://members.tripod.com/~L_Alfano/immig.htm

<http://www.nps.gov/cacl/index.htm>

http://click.lycos.com/director.asp?target=http%3A%2F%2Fwww%2Egorp%2Ecom%2Fgorp%2Fresource%2FUS_nm%2Fny_castl%2Ehtm&id=5&query=Castle+Clinton&source=LCOSWF

<http://istg.rootsweb.com/newcompass/special/castlegarden.html>