

Chapter 26

A Century of Moving

THE WESTERN HEMISPHERE SEEKS POPULATION

MAGNIFICENT OCEAN! I commit all my hopes to thee! A young family, in whose happiness centers my own, I trust to thy fickle, thy vanishing waves. May they live to inherit the land of promise, the land of hope and liberty!

Looking out upon a watery world as the sun went down, an English emigrant wrote this entry in his diary, May 22, 1818. For hours he had been on deck, silently watching until the coast of his native land faded from his sight. He was one of the millions of emigrants who crossed the Atlantic to the Americas in the nineteenth century.

During the early 1800's the armies of Napoleon swept over Europe, all the way from Paris to Moscow. The Americas needed population to develop the resources of the two continents and the tax-burdened peoples of war-weary Europe welcomed a place to go. Thus did the great migration to the western world get under way. The nations of both North and South America entered the race for population. The one winning the largest number of emigrants in the shortest time could develop its natural resources the

quickest. It could become the richest and most powerful nation in the Western Hemisphere. Land was the lure. From the North Pole to the South Pole governments offered free and cheap farms to settlers.

The British encouraged migration to Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa to populate these possessions. The British Government even agreed to pay part of the passage for farm workers, general laborers, and domestic servants, as well as for tradesmen and their families who wanted to settle in Canada. Since most of the British emigrants came from the big manufacturing towns and had never held a plow, they were advised to accept small wages as farm workers while they learned to work on the land. It took time for tailors, shoemakers, and weavers to become wood choppers, stock raisers, and tillers of the soil.

Typical of the British immigrants to Canada was the canny Scotsman who came to look things over before he moved his family. After a stormy voyage of six weeks in a sailing vessel, he landed at Quebec. There he talked with an agent of the Canada Company who advised him to look around a bit before choosing a place to settle. Traveling on a boat to Montreal,

he passed through settlements of French Canadians, with "the bonny white farm houses in the middle of their orchards" and "the beautiful kirks, with tinned steeples glancing in the sun." On a sightseeing tour he continued his way to Toronto, thence overland to view the famous Niagara Falls. Hearing of a fair in London, Ontario, he went to the town to see the cattle and sheep on exhibit. He

wanted to learn more about the crops raised in that part of the country.

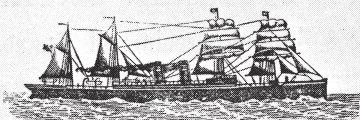
Sauntering through the fair grounds he chanced to meet an old friend, Tam, from his home town in Scotland. Tam had come to Canada ten years before with only enough money to pay his passage. Now he owned a fine farm well-stocked with sheep and cattle. He advised the newcomer to buy an improved farm near his,

ADVERTISEMENTS IN A BRITISH EMIGRANT FOLDER

The British Government encouraged Englishmen to settle in Canada and develop that British possession. Emigrant folders notified farm laborers, tradesmen, and domestic servants that jobs awaited them there. Although jobs lured many to Canada and the United States, the real bait to catch emigrants was free land. In the countries of northern Europe, land meant more to the people than jobs. As farmers, they wanted to work for themselves.

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EMIGRATION.



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soon to be auctioned at a sheriff's sale. The owner had gone to the United States. The Scotsman's bid was the highest, less than \$500 for 100 acres of land. There were thirty cleared acres, a barn, an orchard, and a log house with broken windows and a leaky roof. Then he bought a yoke of oxen for \$60. He arranged to pay Tam \$2.50 a week for boarding himself and his team, while he felled trees, burned brush, and prepared the ground for planting wheat, oats, barley, potatoes, and turnips after the snow had melted. Early in the spring he sent for his wife and children. To his brother, a mechanic in Glasgow, he wrote in a letter:

Tell Mary I'll be sure to have the house sorted for her and the bairns. She should come in one of the earliest ships, go to the agent of the Canada Company in Quebec, get to the head of Ontario, then through the Welland Canal, and I'll meet her. Blythe will I be to see her and the bairns on the banks of Lake Erie, and take them to their own home with the wagon and ox team.

The countries of South America also entered the race for population. Brazil bid high for immigrants, offering land for as little as 44 cents an acre, and to some of the German Colonization Societies, only 22 cents an acre. Europeans coming to buy land and settle on it had their goods imported free, including farm tools and machinery; free board and room while they waited to be taken to the government colonies; free transportation for themselves and their belongings; free lodging and food for six months, if necessary, or until they were settled on a farm; and free seed for their first planting. Most of the government colonies were located in Santa Catarina and other provinces south of Rio de Janeiro. Here the climate was more like that of Europe. A colony of Irish settled in Rio Grande de

Sul, the southernmost province of Brazil. However, most of the immigrants came from Germany, France, and Portugal.

Dom Pedro II, Emperor of Brazil, who was strongly opposed to slavery, used immigration to get rid of the system. His government made it easy for plantation owners to import all the help needed on their big estates. He proved to them that free labor was more profitable than slave labor. By encouraging immigration Brazil was able to abolish slavery without a war. The freed Negroes were hired by former masters to work for wages, especially in the tropical regions where the climate was hard on the white immigrants. The newcomers found employment as managers and overseers on the huge plantations.

Although the nations along the Rio de la Plata were torn with revolutions, they received their share of immigrants because the climate was so much like that of western and southern Europe. When Brazil guaranteed the independence of her southern neighbor, Uruguay, that nation offered land and privileges to foreign settlers. Big colonies of German farmers from the Rhine Valley came over to till the land left idle when slavery was abolished and the owners had no laborers for their fields. Montevideo and Buenos Aires grew up to be foreign cities. The region of the Rio de la Plata became a little Europe where Basques were vegetable gardeners, Italians were boatmen, Germans were farmers, English were merchants, French were shop owners, Portuguese were tavern keepers, and Irish were servants.

However, the mass migration of the nineteenth century descended upon the United States. A ticket cost less to New York City than to Rio de Janeiro and this nation offered greater freedom of

opportunity. The United States had industry as well as land to offer. There were mills and factories where people could work for wages if they had neither the means nor the desire to settle on a farm. The landseeker, with a little money to invest, could go to Canada or Brazil and get along well. The poor job-hunter, with only a ticket in his pocket, had little choice. He came to the United States. This comment was printed in the *Glasgow Chronicle* in 1830:

The manufacturing and commercial speculations which are fostered and encouraged by the tariff laws of America, have had the effect of draining our country of its improvements, and many of its productive population.

An Englishman wrote to a friend in this country:

Though some of the Hull and Yarmouth ships are bound for Quebec, the people are going to the United States, — Three millions of gold will, this very year, go from England to the United States, by means of emigration.

The editor of the *Mainz Gazette*, printed in the town where Germans were crossing the Rhine River to Atlantic ports, wrote in his paper on April 25, 1840:

At no period was emigration to North America so considerable as at present. The emigrants, in general, are families in easy circumstances, some even rich, and whole caravans are daily passing through this town. The Americans will be delighted with their new colonists — young, active men between twenty and thirty years of age.

This mass migration opened up the western lands for settlement and built the transportation to carry the products to market. The Germans usually settled on farms. The Irish dug the canals and laid

the rails. The immigrant created his own market and industry grew to supply it.

Three events of the 1840's pushed the United States far ahead in the race for population. One happened in each of three countries. The potato, introduced by Sir Walter Raleigh in 1610, became the main food of the Irish people. When a blight caused the failure of the potato crop, famine spread over Ireland, taking the lives of about 300,000 persons in a short time. To escape starvation, the Irish fled from their native land. Most of them came to the United States to seek jobs as day laborers. Many young men sold themselves to ship captains, who sold them to foremen of construction gangs to work out their passage. Only a few had money enough to reach into the western country and settle on the land. The Irish settled largely in the cities of the Atlantic seaboard where their labor erected the buildings, installed the water systems, and paved the streets.

In 1848 a revolution in Germany drove thousands of that nation's best citizens to other lands. These people wanted more self-government, and not obtaining it, they left their homeland to seek freedoms in the Americas. With them came Bohemians and others escaping from the political turmoil of central Europe.

In that same year of 1848 gold was discovered in California. The cry, "there's gold on the Sacramento," echoed around the world, luring emigrants from nearly every country on the face of the earth.

By the middle of the nineteenth century the United States was thirty years ahead of the other American nations in the race for population. Although the rising tide of immigration alarmed some citizens, little was done to check it until a

secret society was formed in 1853. To questions the members replied, "I know nothing," and it was called the "Know Nothing Party." There was some cause for alarm. Governments in Europe were known to pay passage of their paupers and criminals to the United States to evade supporting them in almshouses and prisons. An investigator in New York discovered that one third of the steerage passengers on two vessels became inmates of the city poorhouse. Persons unable to support themselves in their homelands found the task even more difficult in a strange new country. To stop this traffic, laws were passed forcing ship captains who brought immigrants physically unfit or undesirable to take them back at their own expense.

Between the years of 1850 and 1855 about 2,500,000 immigrants entered the United States. Guide books printed stories of the hazards for emigrants – smart swindlers, ship fever, crowded steerage, false advertisements, frontier hardships. There was advice ranging from what to wear to where to settle. The author of "The Emigrant Pocket Companion" stated in his guide book:

No man is fit for being an independent emigrant, or even existing at all in a new country, who is not both able and willing to work. He must have health, he must have strength, he must have perseverance, – and be able to turn his hand to many things.

Little heed was paid to these warnings by the onrushing horde, fleeing from hunger and poverty, war and military service, taxes and political persecution. America was a dream. Going up the St. Lawrence or the Rio de la Plata, they pursued the vision of the British emigrant

who sailed up the Delaware River to dock at Philadelphia. It was June, 1818. Only a month before the emigrant had stood on the deck of the same ship, bidding a silent farewell to his native England. Gazing over the green countryside of Pennsylvania, he wrote in his diary:

Hail, land of liberty! I live to behold thy hospitable shores, the abodes of peace and plenty, and the sure refuge of the destitute, the persecuted, and the oppressed of all nations.

IMMIGRANTS ARRIVE FROM SOUTHERN AND EASTERN EUROPE

FROM THE CLOSE of the War for Independence to the year 1855, more than 14,500,000 foreign-born persons arrived to seek new homes in the United States of America. These immigrants came largely from Ireland, Germany, England, and France. Smaller numbers came from forty other nations, including islands like the Azores and the West Indies. Most of these foreigners, Irish, German, and English, had the same general ancestry as the native-born citizens whose forefathers had crossed the Atlantic in colonial times. On the whole these newcomers were welcomed, whether rich or poor, if they were able and willing to work.

The immigrants created a market for food, clothing, and many articles of manufacture, increasing commerce both at home and abroad. Between the years 1840 to 1855, exports increased 300 percent, and imports increased 200 percent. Although these immigrants brought in millions of dollars to invest in the United States, their labor was worth more to the nation than their money.

Industry, expanding rapidly to supply the needs of the increased population, was able to provide employment for most of the job-hunting immigrants except during hard times. Sometimes, there were more jobs than there were men and women to fill them.

During the War Between the States, the American Emigrant Company was organized "for the purpose of procuring and assisting emigrants from foreign countries to settle in the United States." Advertisements like the following one appeared in the newspapers. This one is from the *Missouri Democrat*, 1865:

LABORERS OF EVERY KIND SUPPLIED – The American Emigrant Company is now prepared to supply miners, puddlers, machinists, blacksmiths, moulders, and mechanics of every kind; also gardeners, railroad and farm laborers, and female help at short notice and on reasonable terms.

Agents of this company and others like it, stationed in foreign countries, were supplied with blocks of prepaid steamship tickets to transport laborers to this country. The immigrant signed a contract agreeing to work for a specified time at fixed wages and to repay the sum advanced for his passage and expenses in regular monthly payments. Small payments served to extend the time that the immigrant worked for the wages specified in his contract.

Since wages were higher in the United States than in Europe, these immigrants often agreed to work for less than was paid to native-born citizens. The labor unions protested loudly against the importation of cheap contract workmen. Congress passed a law forbidding the practice. However, societies, formed to aid immigrants, sent agents abroad with

prepaid tickets to offer to laborers desiring to go to the United States without a labor contract. Then other agents in this country met these immigrants at the boat landings and found jobs for them. This insured the payment of the sum advanced for their steamship ticket. The foreign agents, who received a certain percent for each immigrant, did a profitable business in the over-populated and poverty-stricken countries of southern and eastern Europe.

In 1896 a government official in Rome wrote in an Italian magazine:

For Italy, emigration is a necessity. We should desire that some hundreds of thousands of our people should find annually an abiding place abroad. If twice as many left us as now leave we should not lament the loss of them, but rather rejoice that they find work outside.

In January of 1949 the President of the Italian Chamber of Deputies in Rome made this statement:

The problem of emigration is, for us, fundamental, – and this is generally known. We can never employ in Italy all the manpower which we have in overabundance.

About forty percent of the land surface of Italy is mountainous, swampy, and worn-out. On the remaining land enough food cannot be raised to feed the people. Although the Po Valley in the north is industrialized, the factories in the big cities cannot employ all workmen who apply. Many Italians for many years have been forced to emigrate or starve. By 1881 half a million persons from Italy had settled in Argentina. Early in that year at an exhibition in Buenos Aires, pianos, organs, furniture, jewelry, carriages, farm implements, steam engines, boilers, leather goods, and many other articles made by Italians were shown and admired. Some of

the states of Brazil gave prepaid steamship tickets to Italian peasant families who were farmers. In 1888 Brazil acquired 104,000 Italian immigrants. Three years later the number increased to 183,000.

However, under the "padroni" system, more Italians came to the United States than to any other country in the Western Hemisphere. The padroni were Italian agents who spoke English. They made a business of finding jobs in mines, mills, and on railroads and public works for immigrants from their homeland. These immigrants were obligated to work under the orders of their padroni until they had repaid the price of their steamship tickets in monthly payments of as little as \$2.50.

IMMIGRANT RUNNER

During the mass migration, "immigrant runners" did a thriving business. With bundles of steamship tickets stuffed into their pockets, they arrived in European countries seeking emigrants to the United States. They offered workmen free passage across the Atlantic for themselves and families if they signed a wage agreement with the "runner" who agreed to get jobs for them in return for a part of their salary.

Since wages were much higher in the United States than in their homelands, the workmen accepted a much smaller part of the money, received for their labor, than the "runner," who collected their wages. The difference was the "runner's" profit. Some factory owners, needing help, hired "runners" who worked on a commission. Others operated independently.

New York Public Library



In a strange country with a strange language, these Italian workmen were often exploited by these agents who became rich at the expense of their less fortunate countrymen. Labor unions objected, declaring that this system differed little from contract labor and demanded an investigation. Immigrants were summoned to testify before a Congressional committee in the Fiftieth Congress. Among those questioned was an Italian laborer from a village near Naples.

Congressman: "What was your occupation in Italy?"

Immigrant: "Farmer."

Congressman: "What did you receive for farming?"

Immigrant: "Ten cents and meals."

Congressman: "Meals for yourself, or yourself and family?"

Immigrant: "No, sir, the meals were for me, and the family fed on ten cents."

Congressman: "When you landed in this country, were you in possession of any money?"

Immigrant: "Not a cent."

Congressman: "Or property of any kind?"

Immigrant: "Nothing, sir, no property."

Although many of the poorer Italian immigrants could neither read nor write, they had over 2000 years of civilization for a background. They appreciated the opportunities for education in their new homeland and made loyal American citizens. So many had settled in New York that a district of the city was called "Little Italy."

During the Middle Ages, Jewish people were expelled from countries of western Europe. They settled in eastern Europe, especially in Poland and provinces of western Russia. They had little freedom in these countries. Forbidden by law to be farmers and own land, they were forced to live in towns and earn their living in



New York City Housing Authority

COOLING OFF IN EAST HARLEM YEARS AGO

On hot days, city firemen flooded streets in crowded sections of New York City, giving the children a cool shower. These tenements were the first American homes for immigrants of many nationalities. Many of the houses were razed and replaced with large airier apartment buildings by the New York City Housing Authority.

trade and money lending. In the early 1880's anti-Semitic riots broke out in western Russia. The Jewish people were robbed, beaten, and killed, and their houses were stolen, plundered, and burned. Laws passed in 1882 made it almost impossible for them to live in Russia. A Jewish person could have no share in the government, could not hold office, could not assemble without a permit, could not do business on Sundays and Christian holidays, and could not leave his section of a town without permission. They were barred from universities and the learned professions. Then the mass migration of Jewish people began. Being a townspeople, few emigrated to South America where cities

were few and far apart. One-third of the Jewish people in Russia came directly to the United States, before laws were passed establishing quotas for each nation. Most of these immigrants remained where they landed in the neighborhood of New York, making that city and its suburbs the largest Jewish community in the world.

The Jewish immigrant had a "sweater," as the Italian had a padroni. Agents known as sweaters, who could speak English, Russian, and Yiddish, contracted with manufacturers to have ready-cut garments stitched and finished. Sweaters were busy carrying bundles of pants, vests, coats, skirts, dresses, and many articles of clothing to dingy flats and little factories where men, women, and children

worked on them. Often, the factory was only one room in a damp basement or a stuffy attic. In these dirty, crowded, and poorly-ventilated "sweat shops," new immigrants toiled long hours for low wages. Earnings were so small that several families sometimes lived in a one-room flat, sharing the rent.

The sweating system was pointed out as the great evil of unrestricted immigration by those citizens beseeching Congress to limit the number of persons who could enter the United States from a foreign country in any year. In 1905 the Garment Workers of America voted in favor of limiting immigration to protect the foreign-born who were already here. Today, many of the descendants of these Russian emigrants still live in New York City, Brooklyn, and nearby cities and towns, and earn their living in the garment industry. But, the sweat shops have disappeared from the scene.

Since New York was the main port of entry and the poorest immigrants usually stayed where they landed, that city bore the burden of Americanizing most of the foreign-born immigrants who arrived each year. These new citizens were Americanized largely through their children who learned in schools the language and ways of their adopted country. Evening lectures for adults were held in the schools where stereopticon slides were shown of Niagara Falls, the Adirondacks, the Mississippi Valley, Yellowstone Park, and other places in the United States. Courses on how to use the secret ballot were given in Yiddish, Italian, Russian, Slovakian, Polish, and many languages to aid new citizens in learning to vote for the first time in a constitutional republic. Many of these immigrants had never voted until

they became citizens of the United States. Large industrial cities like Pittsburgh, Buffalo, and Chicago promoted Americanization of their foreign-born through programs in schools, churches, libraries, lecture halls, and union meetings.

A Canadian declared that the right of property was the strongest motive for Americanization:

The possession of permanent property creates a tie between the emigrant and his adopted country. There (in the old country) he was dependent, but here independent; there he was a tenant, but here he is the proprietor – the lord of the soil.

The government of Argentina considered it a good investment to buy steamship tickets for farmers who were willing to settle on undeveloped lands away from the seacoast. In one year, 1888 to 1889, the export of corn in Argentina increased nearly 350 percent – more laborers, more crops, more exports, more business, more prosperity. Other nations in South America, especially Brazil, helped farmers to settle on land. The abolition of slavery in May of 1889 in Brazil had cost the planters one-third of their coffee crop. In that same year the government passed a bill to spend \$5,500,000 to increase immigration and secure labor for the plantations.

In 1889 from three German ports, records show that 187,057 emigrants from Germany, Russia, Hungary, Austria, Bohemia, Denmark, Sweden, and smaller European nations boarded vessels to seek new homes in the following places: 179,142 to the United States; 2,522 to the Argentine Republic; 2,043 to Brazil; 816 to Australia; 490 to Africa; 426 to Asia; 328 to various countries in Latin

America; 200 to Chile; 107 to the West Indies; 53 to Mexico; 39 to Peru.

The German Government became alarmed at the loss of many citizens leaving the fatherland for the United States and taking their money with them. These German citizens were going forth to invest their money in the United States and with their labor, to develop the resources of that country. Perhaps the United States would become a rival of Germany for world trade and world power.

In 1880 commissioners at German ports requested emigrants bound for the United States to tell why they preferred that country to others throughout the world. From the answers of over 100,000 emigrants, the German Commissioner of Emigration made this statement in 1880. The emigrants chose the United States because:

There, an opportunity is afforded every one, by diligent work, in a comparatively short time,

to gain possession of a house and land of his own, and to become independent of others and well-to-do.

Thus did the United States win the race for population, develop its resources the fastest, and become the richest and most powerful nation in the Western Hemisphere. The achievements of man are boundless when his spirit is set at liberty. To this land of the free came millions of men, women, and children from places all over the face of the earth. These immigrants pooled their talents and their labor and helped to build the greatest industrial civilization the world has ever known. In doing it most of the people earned for themselves that for which they had come to the New World – a more abundant life. Sometimes, their days were laden with hardships but their hearts were filled with hope. They were free men, carving their own destiny in their own way, and this was what they asked. They MADE history.