When one thinks about immigration during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, images of New York Harbor and Ellis Island immediately spring to mind. Baltimore, however, was a major port of entry – by many estimates the second largest in the nation. Between 1820 and 1989, almost 2 million immigrants came to Baltimore, most between the years 1861 to 1930. . . .

By the late 1800s, the majority of immigrants to the city were German, Polish, Russian, Ukrainian, Czech, Greek and Italian. Many of these newcomers settled in Baltimore with the help of immigrant aid societies and family and friends who had made the journey earlier. Baltimore quickly became a "City of Neighborhoods," a patchwork of ethnic neighborhoods like Highlandtown and Little Italy where immigrants settled and worked. The Port of Baltimore provided ready job opportunities for the immigrant labor force in the form of heavy industry and other maritime-related operations. An even greater number of immigrants, however, only passed through Baltimore on their way to final destinations in the Midwest and Great Plains states, carried along their way by the B&O Railroad's immigration machine.

In 1868, the B&O Railroad forged a business partnership with the North German Lloyd (Norddeutscher Lloyd) Steamship Line based in Bremen, Germany. Baltimore had long had commercial ties to the port of Bremen, Europe's center for the importation of tobacco. **Now, immigrants could purchase a single ticket that included both passage on a steamship from Bremen to Baltimore and rail transportation to their**

destination in the central United States. (The steamship voyage cost $16, or the equivalent of $352 today.) To handle the influx of thousands of immigrants, the B&O Railroad built new, larger immigration passenger cars and an immigration arrival center on piers 8 and 9 in Locust Point, which they replaced with an even grander facility in 1904.

Despite this streamlined process and the state-of-the-art processing center, the ordeal of immigration was an exhausting one. **The sea voyage took about 14 days.** Conditions aboard the steamship were crowded, dirty, and poorly ventilated as hundreds of people cramped into the steerage accommodations, basically a large open space near the bottom of the ship. Illness was common. After such a long and difficult journey, the immigrants' spirits must have been lifted by the sight of the American flag waving over Fort McHenry as they entered Baltimore Harbor. Upon arrival at Locust Point, the immigrants were herded into "separation pens" and given a cursory medical inspection. Doctors checked primarily for trachoma, a contagious eye disease, and for symptoms of serious illnesses that would warrant a more thorough inspection and possible hospitalization or deportation. Immigrants were then interviewed by a government agent who counted and recorded the money the immigrant brought with him. Next, his baggage was inspected and weighed. If the immigrant planned to remain in Baltimore, he was placed in a final pen to await pick-up by friends or relatives as listed on his immigration card. If the immigrant planned to travel farther west, he

picked up his pre-paid railroad ticket or purchased one, and then waited in a large waiting room for his train. Immigrants not staying in Baltimore were not permitted to leave the facility except to board their trains. Fortunately for those with a long wait, the new reception center included a money changing station and a food stand that featured familiar dishes from the homeland. . . .

The first glimpse from the dock of an arriving ship is bewildering in its vast bulk of people, packed closely together. It seems impossible that so many could find sleeping accommodations, for the immensity of the ship is lost sight of. Great bundles of baggage everywhere on the deck serve as seats, and around and through all are the children, a constant moving, shifting kaleidoscope of color. Some line the rail and look with wondering eyes at their strange new surroundings, while others stand and sit in stolid indifference. . . Now and then can be picked out a joyous face of welcome from among the few who have friends on the pier, but as a whole there are none to welcome, no cries of recognition; the silence is strange and oppressive, for to the vast majority it is only the beginning of the end."