

# Port of Entry

Ellis Island is a monument because, like Mt. Everest, it is there. No piece of American land has been more symbolic of this country's history; 12 million immigrants arrived through those somber, turn-of-the-century brick buildings and their predecessors. Possibly 100 million Americans today can trace their heritage to its soil.

And yet no piece of historic land has been harder to deal with. The abandoned structures, closed since 1954, have continued to decay, resistant to anything except massive infusions of funds. Ambitious proposals have come and gone. So have preservationists, historians and photographers, bringing back a desolate record of the detritus of freedom and bureaucracy. Macabre and surreal, those empty halls suggest the grim realities as well as the dream of refuge.

Tomorrow the island will open to the public for the first time in 22 years, thanks to citizens' groups, the National Park Service and a \$1 million Congressional appropriation for limited rehabilitation. It is an appropriate Bicentennial gesture. Ellis Island is a monument in spite of itself.