

## Keeper of the gate

# Ellis Island a welcome site? Only after years of reform

*With the reopening of the immigration center as a historic landmark, it may surprise many to learn that the Labor Department operated the complex for years; administrators struggled to end corruption and the exploitation of aliens*

HENRY P. GUZDA

Between 1903 and 1920, 10 million people emigrated to the United States by passing through the portals of the receiving station on Ellis Island. During that period, the U.S. Department of Labor and its predecessor agency, the Department of Commerce and Labor, administered the immigration laws of the country, including those providing for the operation of Ellis Island.

The island lies just a short distance from the New Jersey shoreline in New York Harbor. The Federal Government, over many years, expanded the land area from 7.5 acres to a landfilled 27.5 acres for new buildings, park areas, and other facilities. The main hall, a spacious brick building with white limestone trim, in French Renaissance style, is the most striking landmark on the island and the site where immigrants first entered for processing. Kitchen facilities, dormitories, a hospital, and a power plant also occupied island space. Docks to receive passenger and cargo vessels expanded in proportion to the island's growth.<sup>1</sup>

Men, women, and children segregated by sex, stood in lines on Ellis Island awaiting a barrage of questions on their potential destinations, intentions for going there, and job prospects upon arrival. Prearranged labor contracting was

illegal and would mean deportation. Inspectors often had limited comprehension of certain languages, especially Slavic ones, and misinterpretations were common. The newcomers faced assembly-line medical exams and if doctors or nurses put certain chalk letters on an immigrant's outer garment it meant detention and possible deportation. (The letter T signified suspected trachoma, H meant a possible heart condition, and LCD translated as loathsome contagious disease. Nonmedical examiners could put LPC (likely to become a public charge) on a person's coat, which also could result in deportation.) One of the island's Public Health Service physicians commented, "these methods, crude as they seem, had to be used because of the great numbers [of immigrants] and the language difficulties."<sup>2</sup>

Detention could last weeks, even years in wartime. During detention the immigrants fell prey to the avarice of contractors handling food concessions, money exchanges, and other personal services. Federal employees of Ellis Island extorted money from detained immigrants by threatening them with deportation. Finally, a special board of inquiry determined whether a detainee was admissible or deportable, the latter was subject to approval by the Secretary of Labor. It was not incomprehensible why the immigrants referred to Ellis Island as the "Isle of Tears."

Processing millions of people, however, was a tedious and taxing chore. The Labor Department and Public Health

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Service employees, grossly understaffed and overworked, faced difficult problems even during the ebb of immigration. During the peak year of 1907, an average 5,000 immigrants arrived daily and 11,747 landed on a recordbreaking day. Inspectors with command of certain languages were in demand, but the supply was always low. To compound these problems, the immigration laws were complex—defying interpretation even by some legal authorities—yet only 1.5 percent of all immigrants were excluded.<sup>3</sup>

### Commerce and Labor: the first 10 years

When the Department of Commerce and Labor assumed responsibility for administration of the island from the Treasury Department in 1903, it received a rather sordid legacy. Both the friends of immigration and those favoring immigration restriction viewed the island's operation as disgraceful. President Theodore Roosevelt, who created the Department of Commerce and Labor in 1903, wanted the agency to reform conditions without delay.

*William Williams to lead.* Roosevelt chose the new Commissioner of Ellis Island, William Williams, a corporation lawyer from New York. He was an unlikely choice because of his jaundiced views on immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe.

But Williams was honest, humane, and very concerned about reports from undercover agents on the conditions allowed by the former commissioner, Thomas Fitchie. Those reports illustrated that the depth of graft and corruption extended from the immigrant inspectors, who extorted bribes from aliens, to aldermen at New York's City Hall, who performed marriage ceremonies for exorbitant fees and "kicked back" commissions to Fitchie. Graft was so well-woven into the administrative fabric of the island's operations that the undercover agents feared for their lives if exposed.<sup>4</sup>

Williams acted quickly; his first official order was for employees to treat immigrants with "kindness and decency" or face dismissal. Several workers were fired after they tried to remove information on the confinement and isolation of immigrants into "pens" from official files. Williams told the President that the term "pen" intimated the kind of treatment the immigrants received, and that Fitchie was aware of the abuse and exploitation.

The food concession on Ellis Island particularly upset the new commissioner. Williams reported:

"I witnessed with my own eyes the fact that immigrants were often fed without knives, forks, or spoons, and I saw them extract boiled beef from their bowls of soup with their fingers . . . (the meat was tainted) and the floors were covered with grease, bones, and other remnants of food for days at a time."

He canceled the existing food contract and awarded one to a different firm at a savings of 15 percent. In his annual report Williams noted that such reforms were gratifying, "but that numerous other instances of abuses or lack of system could be cited."<sup>5</sup>

**Table 1. Immigration to the United States through Ellis Island and all entry ports, 1903–24**

Year	Ellis Island	All entry ports
1903	631,835	857,046
1904	606,019	812,870
1905	788,219	1,026,499
1906	880,036	1,100,735
1907	1,004,756	1,285,349
1908	585,970	782,870
1909	580,617	751,786
1910	786,094	1,041,570
1911	637,003	878,587
1912	605,151	838,172
1913	892,653	1,197,892
1914	1,218,052	1,218,480
1915	178,416	326,700
1916	141,390	298,826
1917	129,446	295,403
1918	28,867	110,618
1919	26,731	141,132
1920	225,206	430,001
1921	560,971	805,228
1922	209,778	309,556
1923	295,473	522,919
1924	315,587	706,896
Total	10,988,270	15,739,135

SOURCE: Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization, Historical Study, 1935.

Reforming the deeply embedded corruption of many years took time, and it appeared too slow for some interested parties. Foreign language newspapers and immigrant aide societies, in particular, accused the Department of Commerce and Labor of countenancing exploitation of the immigrants. The *New York Staats Zeitung* so severely complained that Roosevelt appointed a special investigatory commission in September 1903. Its report illustrated that the drive for reform had taken hold very quickly. Buildings were clean and immigrants were well-fed, and treated with decency. Delays in processing functions and overcrowding resulted, the report concluded, from insufficient staffing and poor facilities, not mistreatment.<sup>6</sup>

By 1905, the island's operation ran very smoothly. Williams believed his job had been completed and returned to private law practice. Reforms continued, however, under his successor Robert Watchorn.

*Robert Watchorn's administration.* Watchorn, like many immigration officials, came from the labor movement, having served as an official of the United Mine Workers union. Unlike many of his labor colleagues, Watchorn was not an immigration restrictionist.<sup>7</sup>

Watchorn had a kindred spirit in Secretary of Commerce and Labor Oscar Straus. Straus, an immigrant and the first Jewish person to serve in a presidential cabinet, believed in an open-door policy for immigration. Whereas previous Secretaries of Commerce and Labor had viewed Ellis Island as an administrative headache, Straus took greater interest in immigration than his predecessors and gave full support to the views of the new commissioner.

The Straus-Watchorn tandem served during the "high tide" of immigration, 1905–09. In the peak year of 1907, 1.3

million people came to the United States. (See table 1 for immigration totals.) Delays in processing and admissions increased despite Watchorn's efforts to streamline operations. He abolished the "temporarily detained" category for immigrants suspected of a minor infraction of law or unable to produce a \$10 minimum reserve before being allowed entry to the mainland. Steamship lines had to provide island officials with informational lists of all passengers before disembarking them. Nonetheless, immigrant inspectors worked 7 days a week from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. for 31 consecutive days in which more than 5,000 persons arrived daily in 1907.<sup>8</sup>

Working conditions for Ellis Island employees worsened considerably during this period. The close proximity of so many people and unsanitary conditions on passenger ships, especially for the bulk of immigrants traveling in steerage, spread vermin and disease among both immigrants and Federal employees. To compensate for long hours and poor conditions, Watchorn petitioned the Congress to raise employees' wages, add staff positions, and appropriate funds for other morale-building efforts. But his endeavor was fruitless, and between 1905 and 1907 there was a turnover rate of approximately 40 percent. Immigration inspector Fiorello LaGuardia, who later became Mayor of New York, commented, "At best, the work was an ordeal. Our compensation, besides our salaries, for the heartbreaking scenes we witness (sic) was the realization that a large percentage of these people pouring into Ellis Island would probably make good and enjoy a better life than they had been accustomed to."<sup>9</sup>

Under Watchorn and Straus, general improvement in the prevention of immigrant exploitation accelerated. Watchorn assigned undercover agents to find abuses, and their reports confirmed his suspicions. For example, steamship companies made \$39 of profit from the \$42 charged to immigrants for transportation from Europe. Agents for employment services conducted an illicit business in contract labor and cooperated with both steamship lines and railroad interests to fleece the aliens. For example, one employment agent charged 50¢ for a short ride from the Ellis Island debarkation point to Grand Central Station and received an additional 45-cent commission for placing them on the New York, New Haven, and Hartford line, regardless of a passenger's actual destination. Railroads re-routed passenger service in order to maximize fares; immigrants bound for Chicago, therefore, often traveled a circuitous route through Norfolk, Virginia. "I am shocked and outraged," said Watchorn, "by the many pretexts resorted to by the opulent and powerful, and by petty grafters to squeeze the last dollars out of the immigrant in quest of work and wages. . . ." In 1907, Watchorn filed charges against railroad and steamship companies with the Interstate Commerce Commission and achieved some success in eliminating the worst abuses.<sup>10</sup>

Watchorn's crusade was noticed. Food contractors, transportation concerns, and employment agencies pressured Straus, the Congress, and President Roosevelt to remove the commissioner from office. In addition, organized labor

complained that the new Ellis Island policies had swamped the U.S. work force with undesirables willing to work for below minimum wages. Even some Federal employees on Ellis Island protested that Watchorn had exceeded his authority by disregarding laws and longstanding work rules.<sup>11</sup> In response, Straus sent an investigatory commission to the island. This commission, headed by popular reformer and intellectual Washington Gladden, and consisting of other ministers and rabbis, found conditions to be exemplary. Gladden reported:<sup>12</sup>

"I am sure that anyone who visits Ellis Island, and intelligently observes what is going on there; who sees the cleanliness and convenience and comfort by which the immigrants are surrounded when they first set foot upon our soil; the ample and beautiful dining room where good food is served to them; the commodious and comfortable sleeping apartments, the roof garden where, in the summer, they may breathe the cool air in the evening; the small army of intelligent and kindly men and women who speak to them in their own languages, and administer to all their wants; the vigilance with which they are safeguarded from the wolves and harpies which in former times were wont to make them a prey . . . I am sure that anyone who sees all this will feel that he has witnessed one of the triumphs of civilization."

Straus also ordered the Commissioner of Corporations to conduct an internal investigation of the island's operations. While not as ebullient and optimistic as the Gladden report, this study gave Watchorn and his administration a good rating. The facilities at the complex, it stated, were clean, sanitary, and well-organized. Watchorn, despite criticisms to the contrary, had deported more immigrants during his years than had Commissioner Williams and was not lax in law enforcement.<sup>13</sup>

Yet the very controversial nature of the immigration question eventually contributed to Watchorn's departure. His former colleagues in the labor movement vehemently opposed "open door" immigration policies, including redistribution of immigration away from labor surplus areas on the eastern seaboard and in the industrial north. Watchorn tried to explain that redistribution could work, at a Labor Department conference on the immigration issue, but ran into criticism from his agency associate, Commissioner of Labor Charles Neill, who argued that the plan wouldn't work.<sup>14</sup>

Such controversy illuminated the serious impediments to a reconfirmation of Watchorn as commissioner. Straus engaged an intensive campaign to have his friend reconfirmed. The Immigrant Protective League and other ethnic organizations joined the campaign, but there were just as many groups, the American Federation of Labor, for example, that opposed a second term. On March 4, 1909, the newly inaugurated President, William Howard Taft, withdrew Watchorn's name from consideration.<sup>15</sup>

*Williams returns.* Taft's Secretary of Commerce and Labor, Charles Nagel, also chose to avoid controversy by persuading William Williams to return as Ellis Island Commissioner in the role of a compromise appointment.

Williams' second term paralleled the first and mirrored that of Watchorn's in attacking corruption. For example, in December 1910, he had the Hellenic Transatlantic Steamship Company prosecuted for willfully smuggling diseased aliens through the island and attempting to bribe immigration officials; 15 company officials went to jail as a result. Williams also withdrew privileges for operating services on the island from some immigrant aid societies which ran unclean boarding houses on the mainland. Thus, Williams received criticism from both sides of the immigration question. Ironically, despite his own restrictive beliefs, he was criticized for lax administration of the immigration laws. Williams voluntarily resigned in 1913, leaving a fairly well-run and efficient operation.<sup>16</sup>

### New problems

As World War I erupted in 1914, an ideological movement swept across the United States. Racial and ethnic stereotyping and eugenics were popularly discussed as an exact science. The president of the New York Zoological Society, Madison Grant, published *Passing of the Great Race*, which called for "Nordic supremacy;" Grant compared old immigration from Northern and Western Europe to the strong species of the animal kingdom and relegated new immigration from Southern and Eastern Europe to the weakest species. In addition, Majority Whip Harold Knutson complained about the "mongrelizing" effect the new immigration had on American society and the Eugenist for the Congressional Committee on Immigration, Harry Laughlin, theorized that the recent immigration possessed a high percentage of inborn socially deviant qualities based on empirical data.<sup>17</sup>

These attitudes were prevalent when the newly created Department of Labor assumed responsibility for Ellis Island in 1913. The labor function in the Department of Commerce and Labor had been secondary in the organization and many interests, especially Samuel Gompers and the American Federation of Labor, wanted it removed and elevated to Cabinet status without nonrelated encumbrances. Organized labor did not particularly want the immigration function placed in the Department of Labor but believed it could be monitored better under friends than in the employer-oriented Department of Commerce.<sup>18</sup>

The first Secretary of Labor, William B. Wilson, a long-time official of the United Mine Workers union, however, did not have the animus toward immigrants held by many labor leaders. His Commissioner of Ellis Island, Frederick C. Howe, was a philosophical ally of Robert Watchorn. While Howe did not have views concurrent with some other Labor Department officials, including his immediate superior Commissioner General of Immigration Anthony Caminetti, he had the support of Wilson and Assistant Secretary of Labor Louis Post.

*Frederick C. Howe's efforts.* Howe's goal was the complete "humanization" of Ellis Island. The temporary occu-

pants of the station, he said, were human beings, not digits in an annual report. He ordered the employees of the island to treat immigrants with respect and, as one of his first acts, ordered the construction of playgrounds for children and opened restricted grassy areas for adults. His two predecessors, Howe noted, had done a fine job improving conditions of Ellis Island, and now it was time to refine their efforts. But World War I immediately altered his plans.<sup>19</sup>

The war severely restricted the flow of immigration. By late 1915, the island's staff faced a turnabout in their work environment. Almost 900,000 people passed through the island during fiscal year 1914, but the number declined to less than 200,000 in 1915 and to less than 30,000 by 1919. During the harsh winter of 1915, Howe provided sleeping quarters on the island to the indigent of New York, but this did not affect the staff. The previously overworked employees now faced Federal reductions-in-force. Howe complained that personnel reductions were harmful and would impair efficiency by decreasing morale. The previously excessive workloads would become normal because of a slack in immigration, he said, so the staff levels should be maintained. "Should immigration materially increase (following the war)," he told Secretary Wilson, "it will require considerable time to restore the staff operations to its former degree of efficiency." Immigration remained low until 1919, but personnel cutbacks resulted in Howe working many of the 400-person staff (650 was the pre-war level) overtime and in functions unfamiliar to employees.<sup>20</sup>

One of the war-related problems was that the island became a domicile for detained and potentially deportable immigrants unable to return to their conflict-ridden homelands. Detention periods extended from weeks to years, and Howe ordered the creation of schools and recreational areas. When some immigration employees protested that the grass and shrubs would be ruined, Howe answered that live babies took precedence over live grass. Buildings received fresh coats of colorful paint and plants were hung in all buildings; some members of the press criticized Federal expenditures for plants until they discovered Howe had paid for them from his own salary.<sup>21</sup>

Special efforts were made to provide for a healthy environment. Island staffers coordinated immigrant recreational events such as baseball games and sewing bees. Immigrant benevolent societies arranged for ethnic celebrations; and Americanization themes dominated events such as patriotic concerts. Immigrant children competed in essay contests describing the American way of life and were rewarded by raising the American flag in special ceremonies. Mrs. Harry Payne Whitney, of Whitney museum fame, donated over 30 paintings and statuary depicting immigrant contributions to America to adorn the grounds and the buildings of Ellis Island.<sup>22</sup>

Critics asked why the Ellis Island commissioner devoted so much time and effort to Americanize potentially deportable immigrants? Howe answered them by releasing some detainees labeled "likely to become a public charge"

to sponsors on the mainland providing homes and employment. He conducted similar "work-release" programs for women charged with "moral turpitude," believing that such crimes were the results of poverty and lack of opportunity, not innate proclivities. In one 18-month period, only 6 of 340 people released had failed the program and other release groups had similar success ratios.<sup>23</sup>

Howe also tried to improve conditions for the Federal employees of Ellis Island. He persuaded the Secretary of Labor to give promotions to deserving employees and arranged for a guest lecture series for the staff; Secretary Wilson and former President William Howard Taft were among the speakers in this forum. Howe also published a series of articles on the competency and integrity of the workers at the complex. "I have never known a group of 500 men and women," he said in one article, "either in public or private work, who were more devoted to their employment or more willing to be of personal service than the government employees stationed at Ellis Island."<sup>24</sup>

*Efforts turn to controversy.* It was the promotion of Howe's own employees over the interests of private contractors that engulfed him in a major controversy. The private concession for feeding immigrants and operating the public restaurant on Ellis Island had been a source of anguish to all commissioners. When the contract for Hudgins and Dumas Co. expired in 1916, Howe did not renew it, operating the concession "in house" with Federal employees. The constant temptation for contractors to reduce food quality and quantity, he said, made such an action necessary. This step, however, aroused much protest from New York businessmen and especially from Congressman William Bennet, a former attorney for Hudgins and Dumas. Secretary Wilson feared a major political problem would develop and ordered Howe to award a contract to a concessionaire.<sup>25</sup>

This was not the sole controversy of Howe's administration. Many immigrants were taken advantage of by employment agents, transportation companies, boardinghouse operators, and other commercial interests. Howe proposed the creation of an Immigration Bureau to oversee the process of relocating aliens away from congested labor surplus areas. Even though he only got an immigration information division similar to the one Robert Watchorn created, it raised protest from businessmen who earned considerable profit from the immigration trade. When Howe broke up a pooling arrangement between steamship lines and railroads, stating, "immigrants should not be sent around Robin Hood's barn because the railroads decreed no single road should get the bulk of traffic," it spawned a letter-writing campaign to the Congress for his removal. Howe also disguised Federal employees as immigrants and uncovered fraud of up to \$12 million propagated by area bankers; this, of course, drew the wrath of the less than honest members of the financial community.<sup>26</sup>

Cries for Howe's removal escalated inversely to the level

of world-wide conflict. As the war waned, his critics, especially steamship lines, increased pressure on their lobbyists to persuade the Congress to restrict the commissioner's activities. Some officials of several steamship lines even paid an immigrant woman \$500 to accuse Howe of engaging in illicit relationships with her and other immigrant women on Ellis Island. Secretary Wilson investigated and found all such charges against Howe were false, but pressure for removal from office did not abate until he resigned in September of 1919—10 months after the war terminated.<sup>27</sup>

Several other problems plagued the administration of Ellis Island during and after Howe's departure. On July 30, 1916, German saboteurs dynamited a munitions storage area near the island, and, while the only serious casualty of the "Black Tom Explosion" was a cat, property damage to the buildings and grounds was extensive. The military commandeered part of the complex to detain prisoners of war following America's entry into the conflict in 1917, and the detainees, confined to overcrowded facilities, conducted several mini-riots in protest. Conditions deteriorated to the point that the local chapter of the National Federation of Federal Employees filed an official protest over wage and working conditions with Howe's successor, Acting Commissioner Byron Uhl. Soon afterward, Secretary Wilson told Assistant Secretary Louis Post and Immigration Commissioner General Anthony Caminetti to "visit Ellis Island and clean up the mess."<sup>28</sup>

### **Immigrant radicals**

With the end of World War I came one of the most controversial and notorious events in the history of civil rights, and Ellis Island was an integral part of the drama. War hysteria, fueled by yellow journal newspapers and eugenical publications, promoted the postwar phenomenon called the "red scare." The ghost of Bolshevism seemed, to many Americans, to haunt the land in the specter of immigrant radicals, especially after the 1919 wave of industrial unrest in immigrant-dominated work forces of the coal, steel, meatpacking, and transportation industries. In 1919, an anarchist placed a bomb on the doorstep of Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer, and, while the blast's only victim was the would-be terrorist, it sparked Palmer and his assistant, J. Edgar Hoover, into a crusade to deport all alien "reds."

Department of Justice marshals swept into immigrant union halls, fraternal society meeting houses, dance halls, and saloons, arresting aliens en masse, often without warrants or concern for due process, under Palmer's orders. While Howe was commissioner only 60 of the 697 arrested aliens were actually deported for willful advocacy of the overthrow of the Federal Government (including membership in the Communist Party). But when Howe was away, and again after his departure, Acting Commissioner Uhl and Commissioner General Caminetti enthusiastically assisted the Justice Department. Ellis Island became a jail for the potential deportees and disembarkation point for shipment overseas.<sup>29</sup>

A heated political and administrative conflict occurred when Justice Department and Labor Department leaders interpreted the immigration laws differently. Secretary of Labor Wilson and Assistant Secretary Post believed the laws, which denied juridical rights to aliens and left their fate in the administrative hands of the Secretary of Labor, were poorly written and ambiguous. They believed that aliens should only face deportation if they openly advocated violent overthrow of the Government. Justice officials viewed membership in a radical organization as a deportable offense. When these officials arrested and scheduled deportation for more than 300 aliens in December 1919, Wilson, who believed some of the detainees were deportable, ordered a stay of deportation for aliens having families (who could not be deported even voluntarily under the immigration laws). All aliens arrested and taken to immigrant stations other than Ellis Island were spared, but Uhl, collaborating with Palmer and Hoover, ignored his superior's order and allowed 249 persons, including anarchists Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman, to be deported.<sup>30</sup>

Apparently encouraged by their success, Hoover and Palmer ordered a massive arrest program in January 1920. Thousands of aliens, many of whom had attained U.S. citizenship, were arrested without warrants and placed in temporary jails to await transportation to Ellis Island. Immigration Commissioner Caminetti approved of *ex post facto* warrants and held special boards of inquiry to process deportation papers without notifying the Secretary of Labor, with whom responsibility for such a procedure rested.

After Wilson became ill, Assistant Secretary Post took immediate steps to correct the illegal and unethical actions of his subordinate. He ordered Caminetti to forward all cases to him and release all detainees on bail until the review process was complete. Post also told J. Edgar Hoover to cease interrogating aliens detained at Ellis Island unless approved by an official board of inquiry sanctioned by the Secretary of Labor or himself. Immigration officials, citing lack of evidence and a low percentage of "guilty" findings of those arrested previously, began refusing warrant requests from Justice officials.<sup>31</sup>

This battle between the two departments continued into the summer of 1920, but it was clear that the Labor Department would not let Ellis Island become a court of star chamber. When Attorney General Palmer ordered his agents to censor the mail of detained aliens on Ellis Island, Labor Department Solicitor Rowland B. Mahany informed him that censorship in peacetime would not be tolerated. Palmer withdrew all but a token force of agents from Ellis Island and other immigrant stations. By mid-1920 the "red scare" had abated, and Post, who faced a Congressional impeachment hearing for his stand against injustice, commented, "We have been going through a state of hysteria. Folks will look back with regret for having made fools of themselves, but there is nothing like a panic to make fools of us all."<sup>32</sup>

## Restrictions begin, Island closes

Historian John Higham contends that the notion of 100 percent Americanism emerged from World War I and manifested itself in measures to restrict immigration. Ellis Island witnessed an immediate surge in postwar immigration, but soon afterward experienced a decline attributable to xenophobia. President Woodrow Wilson pocket-vetted an immigration restriction bill in February 1921; however, the Congress reintroduced and passed it in April. President Warren G. Harding signed the Quota Act of 1921 into law on May 19th. The new Secretary of Labor, James J. Davis, approved of restrictive ideology stating, "I would say that the regulation of immigration is about the most important (issue facing him)". Davis even wrote a book entitled *Selective Immigration* in which he lamented the "mongrelizing" influences on American society wrought by the new immigrants.<sup>33</sup>

But the Quota Act of 1921 would have affected Ellis Island regardless of the philosophical leanings of the Secretary of Labor. It limited the number of foreign nationals allowed entry to 3 percent of their compatriots in the United States, according to the census of 1910; no more than 20 percent of the admissible number could arrive in a single month. The Quota Act of 1924 limited the number further by basing entry quotas on the census of 1890, when even fewer immigrants from Eastern and Southern Europe lived in the United States. Ellis Island assumed the role of a detention center for potential deportations more than of an entry-processing center because immigrant inspections began to occur to an increasing degree in Europe, and also because of the policies of the next Secretary of Labor, William N. Doak (1930–33). Doak so intently wanted to relieve the United States of a perceived foreign menace that he resurrected the Hooverian practice of mass arrests and deportations; this earned for Doak the nicknames "Secretary of Sedition" and "Deportation Chief." While several thousands of immigrants still passed through the station at the Port of New York, totals would never again approach those of 1903–14. And, conditions on the island during the Doak-Depression years reverted to those of the corrupt Fitchie administration, not to improve until 1934. In 1940, the responsibility for administering the immigration laws was transferred to the Department of Justice along with the responsibility for Ellis Island.<sup>34</sup>

The days of massive immigration, however, had passed. Ellis Island served its primary function for only 14 more years, and decay and disrepair had already set in when the doors closed in 1954. But the new historic site has generated considerable attention and enthusiasm; plans for reenactments of the immigrant experience—living history—have already been formulated. The administrative and institutional details of that experience, one hopes, will not be lost, and the roles played by both the Department of Commerce and Labor and the Department of Labor will not be forgotten. □

## —FOOTNOTES—

- <sup>1</sup> U.S. Department of Labor, *Report of the Ellis Island Committee to Secretary of Labor Frances Perkins* (Washington, 1934), pp. 1–10; and the General Committee of Immigrant Aid, *Report on Ellis Island*, undated pamphlet in files of Labor Department Historical Office.
- <sup>2</sup> U.S. Department of Commerce and Labor, *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Immigration, 1905* (Washington, 1906), pp. 61–64. For a detailed account of administrative and legal procedures for immigration and Ellis Island see: Harlan Unrau, *Statue of Liberty Ellis Island Historical Resource Study* (Washington, 1984), 3 volumes.
- <sup>3</sup> U.S. Department of Commerce and Labor, *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Immigration, 1907* (Washington, 1908), pp. 76–79; and Harlan Unrau, *Historic Resource Study*, p. xix.
- <sup>4</sup> F.H. Ainsworth, "Are We Shouldering Europe's Burden?" *Charities*, Feb. 6, 1904, p. 135; *Report to the President by the Ellis Island Commission*, Oct. 6, 1904, pp. 1–15; Maurice Fishberg (Immigration Official) to Terrence Powderly (undated) 1902 and Frank Sargent to Terrence Powderly, Mar. 24, 1903, in Terrence Powderly Papers, Reel No. 80 (Washington, the Catholic University of America.)
- <sup>5</sup> U.S. Department of Commerce and Labor, *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Immigration, 1902* (Washington, 1903), pp. 57–60.
- <sup>6</sup> *New York Staats Zeitung*, Nov. 7, 1908, Translation in Oscar Straus Papers, Library of Congress Manuscript Division.
- <sup>7</sup> Robert Watchorn to Theodore Roosevelt, Jan. 21, 1905, Theodore Roosevelt Papers, Library of Congress Manuscript Division; and Robert Watchorn to Oscar Straus, June 5, 1907, Oscar Straus Papers, Library of Congress Manuscript Division.
- <sup>8</sup> "Flood Gates Taxed at Ellis Island," *Commons and Charities*, Vol. 17, 1906–07, p. 1035.
- <sup>9</sup> Robert Watchorn to Oscar Straus, June 18, 1907, file 43/2, National Archives Record Group, 174; Edward Corsi, *In the Shadow of Liberty: The Chronicle of Ellis Island* (New York, Arno Press, 1969), pp. 71–92; Fiorello La Guardia, *The Making of An Insurgent: An Autobiography* (Philadelphia, PA, 1948), p. 70.
- <sup>10</sup> U.S. Department of Commerce and Labor, *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Immigration, 1907* (Washington, 1908), pp. 155–60; Robert Watchorn to Oscar Straus, May 28, 1906, Straus Papers, Library of Congress Manuscript Division; Robert Watchorn to Oscar Straus, June 22, 1907, file 43/2, National Archives Record Group, 174; C.L. Green to Terrence Powderly, Nov. 2, 1906, Powderly Papers (Washington, Catholic University of America); U.S. Congress, Senate, *Congressional Record*, May 1906, 59c. is, pp. 7213–17.
- <sup>11</sup> Anonymous letter to Theodore Roosevelt, Sept. 11, 1908, Roosevelt Papers, Library of Congress Manuscript Division, Robert Watchorn to Oscar Straus, June 22, 1907 and Watchorn to H. Stevens (Office of Secretary of Commerce and Labor), Sept. 18, 1908, file 43/2, National Archives Record Group, 174; *Knights of Labor Journal*, April 1909, p. 5 and November 1909, pp. 1 and 4.
- <sup>12</sup> "Watchorn Doing Splendid Work," Press clippings on Gladden visit in file 43/2 National Archives Record Group, 174; "Politicians, Hands Off," *Outlook*, Vol. 92, 1907, p. 139.
- <sup>13</sup> Oscar Straus to Clair Hillyer, Bureau of Corporations, Feb. 27, 1909, file 43/2 National Archives Record Group, 174, and unpublished report in this file.
- <sup>14</sup> *Proceedings of the Conference on Immigration Distribution*, Feb. 11, 1909, pp. 24, 80, 83, 104; Theodore Roosevelt to Oscar Straus, Jan. 18, 1907, Straus Papers, Library of Congress Manuscript Division, *Knights of Labor Journal*, May 1909, p. 1.
- <sup>15</sup> William Howard Taft to Philander Knox, Dec. 22, 1908, William Howard Taft Papers, Library of Congress Manuscript Division; folder on Watchorn reappointment in 43/2, National Archives Record Group, 174.
- <sup>16</sup> Secretary of Labor William B. Wilson to William Williams, May 17, 1913, file 2/2 National Archives Record Group, 174; U.S. Department of Labor, *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Immigration, 1913* (Washington, 1914), pp. 55–67.
- <sup>17</sup> Madison Grant, *Passing of the Great Race* (New York, 1916), pp. i–21; Irving Bush, "Immigration Into the U.S.," *Monthly Bulletin*, January 1921, reprint; "The Incomparable Migration," *Outlook*, Dec. 29, 1920, pp. 763–65; U.S. Congress Committee on Immigration and Naturalization, *Hearings on the Analysis of America's Melting Pot* (1923), 67C, 3S, pp. 755–56; "The Old Immigration and the New," *New Republic*, Nov. 28, 1914, p. 10.
- <sup>18</sup> Julius Rosenwald to William Howard Taft, Feb. 28, 1913, file 8/3, National Archives Record Group, 174.
- <sup>19</sup> "Interview with Frederic C. Howe," *Immigrants in America Review*, June 1915, reprint; "Record of Progress," *Immigrants in America Review*, September 1915, pp. 75–76; "Turning Ellis Island Inside Out," *Survey*, Oct. 17, 1914, p. 63; Frederic C. Howe to William B. Wilson, Dec. 26, 1914, file 19/31, National Archives Record Group, 174.
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- <sup>21</sup> "Turned Back in Time of War," *Survey*, May 15, 1916, p. 154.
- <sup>22</sup> Frederic C. Howe to William B. Wilson (reports on Ellis Island 1914–19), file 19/31 (Washington, National Archives Record Group, 174); "Turned Back in Time of War," p. 154.
- <sup>23</sup> "Investigation of Ellis Island Proposed," *Survey*, July 29, 1916, p. 445; *The New York Times*, July 20, 1916, p. 1; U.S. Congress, Committee on Rules, *Hearings on the Conditions at Ellis Island*, Feb. 17, 1917, 64C, 2S (Washington, 1917), pp. 1–7.
- <sup>24</sup> U.S. Department of Labor, *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Immigration, 1917* (Washington, 1918), pp. 364–70; and Frederic C. Howe, *Confessions of a Reformer* (New York, Revisionist Press, 1981), pp. 255–60.
- <sup>25</sup> Frederic C. Howe, *Confessions of a Reformer*, pp. 260–64; "Investigation of Ellis Island Proposed," *Survey*, July 29, 1916, pp. 763; *The New York Times*, Oct. 26, 1915, p. 4.
- <sup>26</sup> Frederic C. Howe, *Confessions of a Reformer*, pp. 260–64 and *Annual Report for 1917*, pp. 365–75.
- <sup>27</sup> Frederic C. Howe, *Confessions of a Reformer*, pp. 266–76.
- <sup>28</sup> William B. Wilson to Louis Post, Jan. 23, 1920, file 151/119, National Archives Record Group, 174, and William B. Wilson to Congressman W.C. Adamson (actually a series of papers on the Black Tom Explosion), January–December 1916, file 16-342, National Archives Record Group, 174; John Mann (National Federation of Federal Employees, Local 4) to Samuel Gompers, Jr., Aug. 2, 1918, file 16/706, National Archives Record Group, 174.
- <sup>29</sup> "Ellis Island Gates Ajar," *Literary Digest*, Dec. 13, 1919, pp. 17–18; Wilson to Anthony Caminetti, Commissioner General of Immigration, Mar. 20, 1919, file 167/255 and Louis Post to Caminetti, May 8, 1920, file 167/642, National Archives Record Group, 174.
- <sup>30</sup> William B. Wilson to Anthony Caminetti, Mar. 20, 1919, file 167/255; Wilson to F.L. Douglas, New York City, NY, Feb. 5, 1920, file 167/255 and Wilson to Caminetti, Mar. 25, 1920, file 151/29, National Archives Record Group, 174).
- <sup>31</sup> Louis Post to Anthony Caminetti, Mar. 31, 1920, file 151/29; and Post to J. Edgar Hoover, Justice Department, Apr. 21, 1920, file 167/255, National Archives Record Group, 174.
- <sup>32</sup> Louis Post to O.F. Thurn (personal friend), May 16, 1920, file 167/255, National Archives Record Group, 174.
- <sup>33</sup> John Higham, *Stranger in the Land* (New York, NY, Atheneum, 1983), p. 235; Robert Zieger, "The Career of James J. Davis," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, January 1974, pp. 81–84; (Transcript) Radio Address by James J. Davis over WRC Radio, Washington, Feb. 2, 1924; James J. Davis, *Selective Immigration* (St. Paul, MN, Scott-Mitchell Publishers, 1925), pp. 12–46.
- <sup>34</sup> Gardner Jackson, "Doak the Deportation Chief," *Nation*, Mar. 18, 1931, p. 295; Correspondence files of William N. Doak, July 1931, file 167/255–B, National Archives Record Group, 174; Files of U.S. Department of Labor Historical Office, Doak–Davis folders. For additional reading on the "red scare" see, Robert K. Murray, *The Red Scare: A Study in National Hysteria* (Westport, CT, Greenwood Press, 1955, and reprinted 1980).