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¶ BC-APN--Grandfather's-Ellis

¶ AGENCIES AND RADIO OUT From AP Newsfeatures With BC-APN--Grandfather's Story By LISA M. HAMM= Associated Press Writer

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^AGENCIES AND RADIO OUT From AP Newsfeatures With BC-APN--Grandfather's Story By LISA M. HAMM= Associated Press Writer=

¶ NEW YORK (AP) - The dream of a better life must have seemed elusive to millions of foreigners who had to endure rigorous inspections at Ellis Island before they could enter the New World.

¶ Steamships arriving in New York Harbor gave their relieved passengers awe-inspiring views of the Statue of Liberty, her beckoning torch aloft.

¶ But when the huge crafts docked, only wealthier first- and second-class passengers were allowed off.

¶ The rest - poor laborers and families who had uprooted themselves from their lifetime homes - had to grab their few possessions and board open-air barges to the Ellis Island immigration station.

¶ The din was overwhelming inside the imposing French-Renaissance style building. Terrified arrivals, most fleeing poverty in Europe, clutched their loved ones.

¶ They were given tag numbers and ordered to leave their baggage and climb the stairs to the Great Hall. There, males and females were separated.

¶ Examiners inspected them assembly-line fashion for physical defects and vigorously deloused them. They used a buttonhook to look underneath eyelids for trachoma, a contagious eye disease whose presence was cause to be sent home.

¶ Examiners next peppered the immigrants with questions through interpreters.

¶ "What's your occupation?"

¶ "Can you read or write?"

¶ "Do you have \$50?"

¶ "Are you a polygamist? An anarchist?" A "yes" to either of those questions meant immediate deportation.

¶ Some were given mental examinations or ordered to appear before a Board of Special Inquiry. Two percent were deported.

¶ Domenic Troisi, my grandfather, who passed through Ellis Island in 1907 after a steamship voyage from Naples, Italy, was listed as illiterate because an interpreter misunderstood Neapolitan dialect and thought his father answered "no" when asked if his three sons could read and write.

¶ Most immigrants stayed at the island less than five hours, even during its peak years from 1892 to 1924. But my grandfather's family was detained because his 57-year-old father, Beniamino, was considered too old to work and needed his American brother-in-law to vouch for him.

¶ So they waited. The family slept in narrow, three-tiered canvas bunks in a crowded dormitory. At mealtimes, they were crammed together at long, narrow tables in the cafeteria.

¶ Still, 13-year-old Domenic reveled in the adventure.

¶ "We enjoyed our stay at Ellis Island," he wrote later in a book of remembrances. "The food was good and we had meat every day and even butter on our bread, which was a luxury we had never enjoyed before 3/8"

¶ Three days later, Donato Buongiorno claimed the family, and they crossed to Manhattan to begin their new life.

¶ End Adv Sunday Feb. 7

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