

Castle Garden

By the 1840s up to forty passenger ships arrived in New York harbor on a daily basis. The largest of these ships could carry up to 1,000 people, all who traveled as steerage passengers. Many of these passengers carried diseases such as typhus, cholera and smallpox. The early state legislature, dating back to the 1790s, required the sick to be taken to the marine hospital on Tompkinsville, which was located on Staten Island. Many ships captains regarded this law as a time-consuming nuisance and either ignored the law or dropped their sick passengers on a remote area of New Jersey, such as Perth Amboy.

When the immigrants arrived in Manhattan, they were met by members of the various immigrant societies whose job was to help them acclimate to their new country. They also met up with thieves, villains and con-artists of all kinds. However, these sheer numbers of immigrants could not all be assisted by these societies. In 1847, overcoming bitter opposition from politicians and would-be predators, New York State created the Board of Commissioners of Emigration. The panel included the mayors of both New York and Brooklyn, members of several Emigrant Societies and several other local politicians.

The board was constantly under criticism but they did make two major changes in immigration policy. One of their first moves was to create the Emigrant Refuge and Hospital on Ward's Island in 1847. It began as several temporary buildings but by the 1850s it was the largest hospital complex in the world!

The second change came in 1855 when the commissioners converted Castle Garden into the Emigrant Landing Depot. After ships had passed through the Quarantine Station (six miles below the city) they then anchored off the Castle Garden pier, where they were inspected by both medical officers and customs officials. Once cleared, the passengers were then sent on a barge to the great stone rotunda, the new welcoming point to America. Travelers moving beyond New York were helped by railroad and steamship agents and for those looking for a job in New York, they could go to the Intelligence Bureau and Labor Exchange located within the complex. Thousands of unskilled immigrants were found jobs on inland farms, mines, factories, construction sites, laborers, and domestic servants.



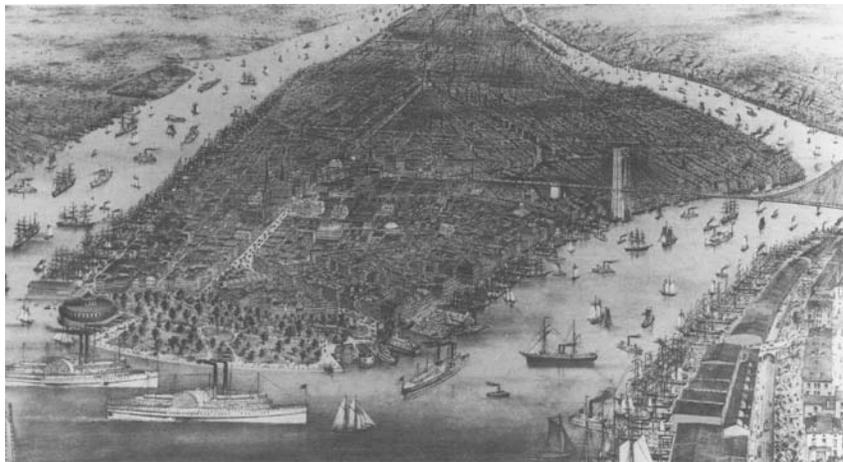
So where was Castle Garden and what was it before it became New York's center for immigration?

Castle Garden began its life as Castle Clinton, a colonial fortress off the Battery built to protect the city. In the 1820s, the lower west side of Manhattan (along Broadway and around Greenwich Street, Beekman and Barclay Streets and around the Wall Street area) was the most fashionable place to live. This was the city's park and promenade district and it was greatly enhanced when, in 1824, New York City bought Castle Clinton from the federal government and created a resort out of the area. It was attached to the Battery Park area by a wooden bridge (ninety paces long and illuminated by gas lamps). The castle was refurbished into a theater and the name changed to Castle Garden.



The Battery Park promenade in 1830

Along with a theater, a grand ballroom was added to the park. In fact, on September 14, 1824, over six thousand guests attended a grand fete there to the Revolutionary hero the marquis de Lafayette.



Currier and Ives Print of New York in 1876. Castle Garden is in the lower left.

A strange and scary incident took place in the early days of Castle Garden. In 1833, President Andrew Jackson came to New York on a “popularity” visit. His ship landed at Castle garden where he was met by a hundred thousand people all jammed along the Battery. Once he came off the ship, Jackson mounted a horse and led a procession of cabinet members, governors, congressmen, and mayors across the wooden footbridge connecting the old fort Battery Park. The moment Jackson reached dry land, the bridge collapsed behind him, causing his entourage to fall into the shallow waters under the bridge. The grand parade continued up Broadway to City Hall with Jackson in front, followed by his dripping-wet dignitaries.

Another strange event at Castle Garden took place in October, 1842. Samuel Morse, the inventor of the Morse Code, planned a demonstration of his device in New York. On a moonlit night, a boatman rowed Morse from Governors Island to Castle Garden. During his journey, Morse was lowering over the side two miles of copper wire insulated with tar, pitch, hemp, and India rubber. On the following morning, the New York Herald announced that his demonstration would take place at noon. The receiver worked for a while but then stopped as the wire became snagged on a departing ship’s anchor and the crew cut away the wire not knowing what it was. The crowd that assembled to see the demonstration thought that Morse’s demonstration was a hoax so they left, loudly booing the inventor.

Another famous person to visit Castle Garden was Jenny Lind, the Swedish singer. She was booked by P.T. Barnum to perform 150 concerts across the country. Lind was brought to America in an effort to purify the theater industry of scandalous and ill-reputed women. Lind had developed a reputation for being pious, charitable, modesty and had a “spotless” private life, perfect to change the theatre and performance industries to a respectable trade. It was said that Lind was paid in advance \$150,000 plus expenses in advance for these concerts.

In September 1850 Barnum gave her one of the greatest welcomes in New York City history. Thousands of people crowded the Canal Street dock where she landed and threw flowers ahead of where she walked. Her first concert was on September 11th at Castle Garden and she performed for an audience of just over 5,000 people. In a closing gesture of goodwill, Jenny Lind donated her share of the evening’s profit to several New York charities.

Despite its location and efficiency, Castle garden soon became too small to handle the number of immigrants arriving in New York. Between 1865 and 1873, over 200,000 new migrants arrived through Castle Garden each year. The only year to have a lower figure was 1877 when there was a major depression in America. Even then, 63,000 immigrants passed through the facility, despite the knowledge of hard times to come. What really failed was the old fashioned state-run system at Castle Garden. In 1890 the recently created federal Bureau of Immigration took over the handling of immigrants. Plans were made to replace the overburdened Castle Garden and build a new facility on Ellis Island which opened on January 1st 1892. An era of New York immigrant history had ended.

Where was Castle Garden located?



The above picture is a close-up and part of Bachman's "*bird's-eye view of New Brooklyn*", 1850

Castle Garden - Lower left, is the building projecting into the harbor.
Battery Park is shown by the trees at the bottom of Manhattan Island.
The Church in the top left is Trinity Church.
You can clearly see Broadway running North-South next to the church.
The buildings to the right of Trinity Church are the Federal Court Houses