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[Castle Garden](#)

New York *Daily Times*, August 4, 1855, Page 1, an article reporting on activities at Castle Garden, newly opened as an immigrant depot by the New York Board of Emigration Commisisoners. The writer commends Castle Garden for barring "runners" and others who would prey upon and exploit new arrivals. But the writer also suggests the potential for corruption within Castle Garden, and names several points that would soon become notorious for fleecing poor immigrants of their savings--the weighing and transfer of baggage, sales of transportation inland, vendors selling snacks, etc. *(The etchings shown here are not original to the Daily Times item, but have been included to illustrate the article.)*

CASTLE GARDEN

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New Emigrants are Treated on Landing

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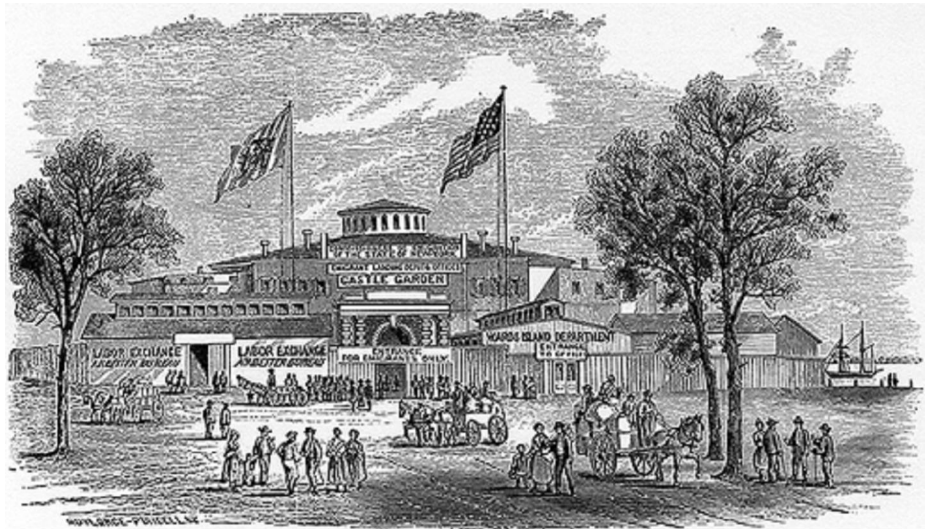
Honored is that house which for generation after generation has served as an ornament, and in its old age commences a new corner of practical usefulness. And our venerable Castle Garden is very highly considered that, after half a century of service as a military rallying place and a fashionable resort for the peddlers of amusement, now when its walls are cracked and crumbling and all its early glory deserted, it is vouchsafed the privilege of granting a home to all humanity, as well as to the City, of which it is the gateway. In the old time, New York received LaFayette in Castle Garden with its most profuse hospitality; to-day hundreds of the countrymen of LaFayette come over from vine-clad France, and in Castle Garden receive the first welcome to America. So, after all, the change is not so very great. Instead of one ovation a year to some distinguished foreigner, henceforth there will be a perpetual ovation to thousands of foreigners and, whereas only straggling couples have heretofore promenaded the balcony and pledged their eternal troth, henceforth it is utterly given up to young and old, lads and lasses, old men and crusty maids to wander at will throughout it, talking about good old times and plotting for future revenue on Western prairies, or arranging for the service of the clergyman, and the quiet cottage and the babies that are to be born.

The new order of things is fairly inaugurated. We went down yesterday to see how it works.

Three ships loaded with emigrants arrived up from Quarantine, and it was a busy time all round. Compose yourself,

reader, while we tell about it:

A high board fence, through which the eye can not peer, nor over which the most curious boy can climb—for it is thirteen feet high—shuts in the proper inmates and shuts out intruders; among the “cuts” are all emigrant runners. On Thursday several of these hopeful gentlemen dressed themselves in emigrants’ clothes and tried to gain admittance under the pretense of having been landed in company with those just arrived. But the dodge did not work. Others pleaded earnestly to get in to see a father or a brother, a sister or other relative, who was among the passengers. But they were too well known to palm themselves off on that pretense.



Yesterday’s few did not scruple to manifest their dislike by open demonstrations of hostility. Besides continually hooting at the employees of the Commission, as they passed in and out, they attacked one or two of them with stones. They went at Commissioner Garrigur so fiercely that he called the Police to his aid. Commissioner Kennedy drew a revolver upon them, which had the effect of cooling them somewhat. It is feared, however, the end is not yet. The Commissioners, and those under them, will go armed for the present, and will be ready for any emergency. These runners have sucked the life-blood of emigrants for so long that they think they have a right to it. And now, when upon a sudden “their occupation’s gone,” they feel as melancholy and dissatisfied with the world as do the liquor dealers where a Maine Law is honestly observed.

A policeman waved the leeches aside, and we presented our face at the raised opening of a narrow door. A word assured the porter, and we entered, registering our names where some score had preceded us, as is the rule for all visitors to do. Now passing the heavy door of old Castle Clinton—that was its name until 1823—let us push straight through to the opposite side and out upon the wharf. Here is a busy time. A heavily-loaded emigrant ship has just anchored in the stream, and the barge *Pilgrim*, towed by a steamer, is now just fastened to the pier with all her company and their luggage. The ship is the *Mary*, of Havre, and her passengers are of the better class,—stout, clean looking Hollanders, hopeful and hearty peasants from France—men who have a trade in their hands, skill in their brawny arms, and money in their pockets, and women who promise to be helps meet for industrious and intelligent men. As they leave the barge, they are examined with reference to their health, and to discover if any of them should be conveyed to the Hospital. They then enter the Garden and present themselves immediately at the desk in the centre of the room. There the names are registered, and the names and number of their family, the ship they come in, their point of destination, the route they prefer taking to reach it, the amount of money that they bring, etc. The following is the number of emigrants arrived these last three days, and the amount of money that they brought with them,

By the <i>Albert</i>	240 passengers	\$15,000
By the <i>Bridgewater</i>	450 passengers	\$1,753
By the <i>Lelia</i>	12 families	\$238
By the <i>Mary</i>	200 passengers	\$14,434

If any are ignorant of the routes West an officer points out the peculiarities of each, shows the nearest cut to distant places, and informs them of the prices of tickets. Maps of the States and of the routes are hung about the room, and if the officer does his duty, no intelligent man need decide until he knows the general features of the land that lies between the promised land and Castle Garden. This information is what almost every emigrant needs, and the officer charged with the duty should be one of the best of men. The moment that he recommends one route above another he urges to the selection of this one or the other, he has violated a rule of the establishment and is worthy

to be kicked out.

Next, the emigrant is shown to the baths. We join the crowd of males that flock in to the right. Here we find a large room, in the centre of which hang several coarse roller towels, and along the side is a deep trough of running Croton. This is the wash-room. Soap abounds—we hope no motives of niggardly economy will ever make it lose plenty. Behind a screen that reaches across the room is the basin for bathing. A dozen or two can be accommodated in it at the same time. Indeed, every facility is granted the new comer, whatever may be his condition on entering it, to leave Castle Garden personally clean. The female bath and wash-room were the counterpart of the male, but as it was in use at the time, we consented to take the statement of our conductor and forgo a personal investigation.

Back now to the Weighmaster on the wharf each head of a family must go, point out his luggage, and receive a certificate of its aggregate weight.



Now, if the emigrant desires to stop in the City, he may leave his luggage, to be called for when wanted, and issuing out at the narrow front gate, saunter up Broadway, and squat, or tent, or buy and build as suits his own sweet will,—he is already a prospective American citizen and has the freedom of the City or the land. But few by this arrival elect to stop here—for they are wise enough to push on where they will be welcomed—to the West. All such are directed to the Clerk in an office at the front part of the building, where they exhibit their tickets, if they purchased them in the old country, or purchase new ones if unsupplied.

If the party elects to stay a day in the City, seeing its sights and getting a sense of its sounds, he is at liberty to do so, but there are no beds in the Castle, and he must take his chance with the hospitable or craven, the honest or the sharky of the metropolis, for the night. Most prefer to go on at once. And such need not wait long. The barge is soon reloaded with the baggage, and the steamer again fastening and they are borne in the several depots they are to go by without cost, and deposited just in time to take the next train onward. So does the honored old Castle enable the Commissioners of Emigration at least to fulfill their intention of dispatching the business of the Board promptly, protecting the City from the annoyance of an immense horde of strangers utterly ignorant of the name of a street, and entirely at the mercy of heartless runners and landlords. We cannot judge, of course, how soon corruption may squeeze in the narrow entrance to the Castle, and villainous tyranny begin its abuses, but it will make the eyes of the lover of his kind water with gratitude to see the improvement already effected in behalf of the poor emigrant by the removal into Castle Garden.

The large hall of the Garden is a capital place for young Europe to enjoy itself in, during the brief bouts of his tarry in our City, on his route westward. A tall fountain feeds a noble basin of water near the spot where the old stage was, and cools the air even at the noon of the heated term. The children were rollicking about it—sailing their paper boats, and full of unrestrained glee. The women eat in groups, talking in some of those crooked old country languages that make us wonder how any talking can be done there until the people come of age,—some knitting, some cutting and eating slices of rye German bread and cheese, some patching and fixing up the wardrobes of their family. They would not have cut a very fine figure in the hall room of the Yacht Club last night, but in view of their healthy forms and faces, we would like to see them matched in the dairy, the kitchen or the field with so many of our pale New York beauties. The prevalent head dress resembled such cushions as the ladies construct of druggot and stuff with hay, set upon the crown of the head, fastened by a broad belt over the head and under the chin. They wore abundant woollen skirts, and some were of no meaner breadth about the hips than our Newport queens when girded with a couple of the “corded”—but for a different reason. It was a strapping dame, we saw, who having eaten no more than the mere nubbin of a long German loaf, proceeded to pocket the big balance. She lifted up her frock, and into a sack sowed fast to her petticoat—that more than half a city bushel might be stowed in—dropped it as one might drop her thimble. As the pocket is only entered from within we—who never bet—will wager our inkstand that no pickpocket ever lightens her of the load.

The whole castle is theirs to ramble in, and none hinder any, wherever they choose to stop in it. The best seats are free, and numbers that at Jenny Lind's concerts sold at fabulous prices, were open to the poorest.

In a corner, a lad sells bread and cheese, and milk at what seems a high price, but is really cheap when it is remembered that a franc is always taken there for a shilling.

Sorry are we to add that there is a shadow of danger that the Commissioners may not be able to retain possession of the Garden for its present excellent use. But there is a little could—in the Councilmen's Chamber.

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Castle Garden in the Councilmen's Committee

On Friday afternoon the Committee on Public Health of the Board of Councilmen—(present, Messrs. Ranney, Slevin, and Smith)—met in the City Hall, to consider the report from the Board of Alderman as to the use of Castle Garden for an Emigrant Depot, and to hear parties in relation thereto. Messrs. Couenhoven and Cooper were absent.

Mr. A.J. Perry appeared on behalf of the remonstrants. He quoted largely from the communication from the Comptroller, in reply to a resolution relative to leaving Castle Garden to the Commissioners of Emigration, presented to the Board of Alderman, May 31, 1855. After reciting the history of the various covenants to which Castle Garden had been subjected, as fully and explicitly set forth in that document.

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Last updated: January 21, 2005 and maintained by [S. Swiggum](#) and [M. Kohli](#)