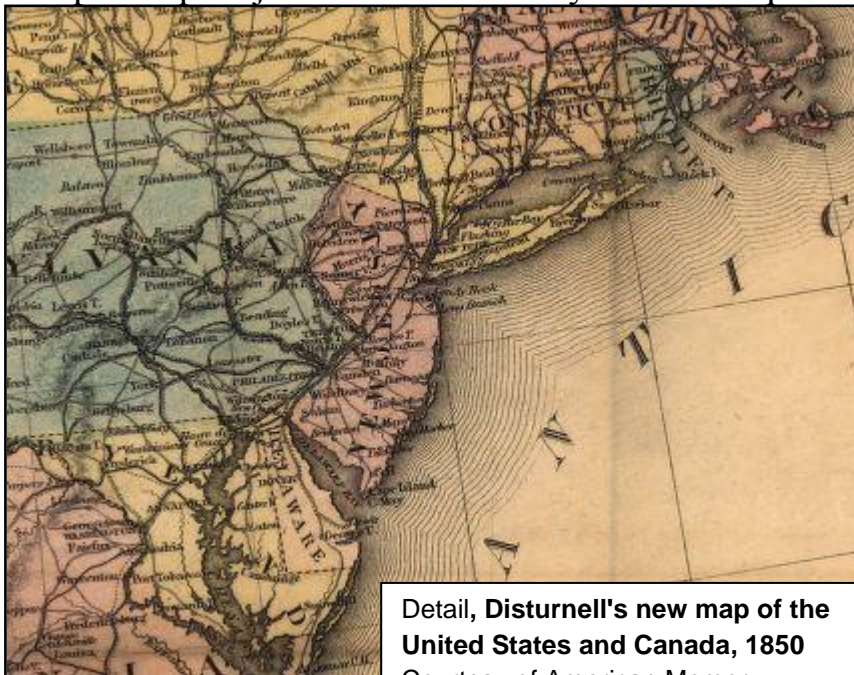


Student Handout 2-What is a Quarantine Station?

People from Venice were said to begin the process of **quarantine** in the 1300s during the Black Plague (when a deadly disease spread and killed millions). The word *quarantine* originates from the Latin word for forty. Prior to entering a seaport city, ships and people were forced to wait in isolation for forty days. After this *quarantine*, the hope was that the spread of disease was controlled. Designed to address the needs of the sick, poor, and outcast, these *quarantine* stations were nicknamed “**lazarettos**” after St. Lazarus (the patron saint of lepers and hospitals).

Immigrants have come to the United States for over four hundred years. Most major towns and cities along the eastern seaboard had *quarantine* laws in the 1700s. In the late 1730s, New York built a quarantine station on Bedloe Island (the current location of the Statue of Liberty) where ships with contagious passengers were held. The most feared diseases at the time were **smallpox** and **yellow fever**. The best treatment for these diseases was still widely misunderstood, so symptoms often led to death. Some deadly symptoms of *smallpox* included fever, body-aches, and rash. *Yellow fever* victims’ symptoms included black vomit, high fever, and liver failure- which caused a yellowing of the skin and eyes. In 1793, the city of Philadelphia, then the capital of the United States, experienced a yellow fever epidemic so severe, that thousands of residents fled, including President George Washington. It is estimated that almost 5,000 people died (1/10th of Philadelphia’s population). By 1794, the city of Philadelphia set up a hospital just outside of the city’s limits to quarantine the sick. The hospital



Detail, Disturnell's new map of the United States and Canada, 1850
Courtesy of American Memory,
Library of Congress, Map Division

was known as the Marine Hospital and sometimes referred to as the *Lazaretto*. According to historian Dr. David Barnes, “the old quarantine station of Philadelphia was located on Province Island (where the Schuylkill empties into the Delaware).” But after other yellow fever

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A map of Philadelphia and parts adjacent: with a perspective view of the State-House (1752), Courtesy of the Library of Congress
Detail : Philadelphia (marked by cross-section grid) and Delaware River to the south.

epidemics in the summers of 1794, 1796, 1797, and 1798, officials argued that the Province Island hospital (marked by a white circle on the map) was too close to the city limits. A new quarantine hospital was built on Tincum Island beginning in 1799 (marked by a white star on the map). It is this *Lazaretto* in Essington, Pennsylvania that still stands today and represents the oldest surviving quarantine station in the United States.

Millions of immigrants used Philadelphia as a port of entry into the United States. But before they were permitted access into the city, historian Dr. David Barnes said that “all arriving ships, passengers, and cargo were inspected--and quarantined if necessary.” The main goal of the *Lazaretto*

on Tincum Island was to prevent the spread of disease. The quarantine station and hospital helped the “sick passengers on arriving vessels...[while] simultaneously providing...protection to the healthy citizens of Philadelphia.” Thousands of sick were “treated, clothed and fed there...” Sadly, some did not survive. There were instances of “suffering and death” at the *Lazaretto*. As growing numbers of immigrants arrived, more interviews and restrictions were required. By 1895, the Lazaretto on Tincum Island was no longer in use and other national entry-points were used. Ellis Island (1892-1954) in New York and Angel Island (1910-1940) in San Francisco, California became federally regulated immigration stations.

Today, travelers are often inspected at borders and international airports. But for almost one hundred years, the *Lazaretto* managed Philadelphia’s public healthcare and immigration “in a crucial period of our nation’s growth (1801-1895).”

Quotations courtesy of David S. Barnes, Associate Professor, Department of History & Sociology of Science, University of Pennsylvania. See Barnes’ website - <http://www.sas.upenn.edu/~dbarnes/Lazaretto.html>.