



Lesson 10– The Wretched Road to the Poorhouse

Objectives - Students will:

- view UCPH documents and discover the nature of illnesses affecting immigrants arriving in Ulster County,
- interpret data from a pie graph and draw conclusions as to why many immigrants were admitted to the Ulster County Poorhouse,
- interpret information from an 1852 poorhouse ledger.



Courtesy of Haviland-Heidgerd Historical Collection

Materials

- Student Activity Sheet 10

Background Information

From 1828 until 1976, Ulster County residents as well as newly arrived immigrants who could not support themselves, were sent to a facility in New Paltz called the Ulster County Poorhouse. The Poorhouse supported the unemployed, the unemployable, the crippled, the ill, the homeless, elderly and mentally ill of the county. For more information and photos, please go to <http://www.co.ulster.ny.us/poorhouse> website.

SHIP FEVER

Many newly arrived immigrants contracted Ship Fever on their trip aboard overcrowded, filthy ships. Once arriving in NY, many chose to travel up the Hudson in search of employment. For some, their arrival came too late, having incubated the dreaded Ship Fever (caused by bites from lice and fleas). With no one to take care of them, many were sent to the Ulster County Poorhouse.

Ship Fever, also called Typhus, was once called gaol fever or ship fever because it was common in prisons and on ships that had been at sea a long time. Typhus is common with people who do not bathe or change clothes often and must live in close quarters. Lice cling to clothing and are easily passed from person to person. They move quickly from one person to the next when body temperature changes, as in death or fever, since lice cannot withstand changes in body temperature.

A louse becomes infectious six days after it has bitten an infected person or a rat. People become infected by the louse either by scratching it into her/his skin or the puncture wound the louse has made. The louse will itself die, ten days after it is infected. It takes approximately twelve days for an infected person to show symptoms. The symptoms include high fever, headaches, chills, body aches, and pains. The next stage may be delirium, coma and heart failure. Reddish spots appear on the body resembling fleabites. At present, Typhus can be cured by antibiotics.



Teaching Sequence

1. Class discussion of poorhouses
 - a. Explain what a poorhouse was using information from the Ulster County Poorhouse Project Website.
2. Analyzing and interpreting information
 - a. Distribute Activity Sheet 10 (two sided).
 - b. Point out vocabulary word on side two.
 - prevalent: existing, happening, or used widely.
 - malignant: threatening to life and health, deadly.
 - afflicted: to cause to suffer, as from disease, pain, or trouble.
 - quarantine: the prevention or tight control of the movement of people, animals, plants, or goods out of a region to keep pests or disease from spreading.
3. Writing an essay
 - a. Document Based Essay: Assign the following DBQ to the class:
Using the information from the previous documents and your knowledge of social studies, write a well organized essay describing the hardships many immigrants faced when coming to the United States.
 - b. Direct students to use the information they have learned from the chart, ledger, newspaper article and class discussion to write a well organized essay describing the hardships many immigrants faced when coming to America. Remind students to include an introduction, body, and a conclusion.

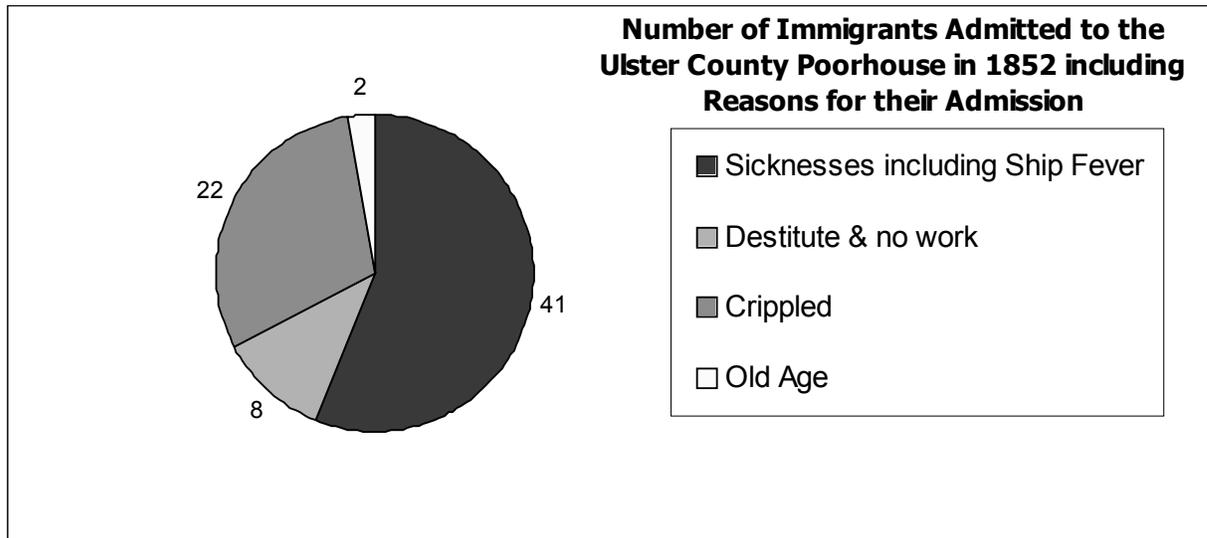


*Grounds of Ulster County Poorhouse, c. 1940
Courtesy of Gail Logan*



Activity Sheet 10

Ulster County Poorhouse

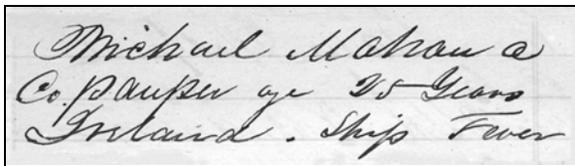


1. According to this pie chart, what was the main reason immigrants were sent to the Ulster County Poorhouse? Why do think this is so?

2. How many immigrants were sent to the Poorhouse due to old age? _____

3. How many immigrants had no place to live or didn't have a job? _____

The following document was taken from the April 1852 Ledger of the Ulster County Superintendent of the Poor:



Transcription

Michael Mahan a
Co. pauper age 25 years
Ireland Ship Fever

4. How old is Michael Mahan? _____

5. What country did he emigrate from? _____

6. Why did he end up at the Poorhouse?



Many immigrants landed in Kingston, having contracted "Ship Fever" on their trip here from Europe. Read the following newspaper article and find out more about "ship fever".

Vocabulary

prevalent: existing, happening, or used widely.

malignant: threatening to life and health, deadly.

afflicted: to cause to suffer, as from disease, pain, or trouble.

quarantine: the prevention or tight control of the movement of people, animals, plants, or goods out of a region to keep pests or disease from spreading

June 18, 1847 *Cork Examiner*

Extract of a private letter from New York—JUNE 1ST, 1847—"Ship fever is now very prevalent here. It is, properly speaking, a most malignant kind of yellow fever. In almost every vessel that arrives several persons are afflicted with it, in consequence of which all the hospitals are full. The Board of Health are fitting up temporary places for the reception of patients. From the numbers that have been attacked, it is feared, that the fever will spread through the City as soon as the warm weather sets in.

At present it is confined to the neighbourhood of emigrant boarding houses. Dr. Van Buren, who has been stationed at the quarantine ground, has died of it, and several of the doctors that have been attending the Marine hospitals are ill with it. 567 have died on the passages from Great Britain to New York, since the 1st of January."

7. According to this newspaper, what disease is most prevalent in New York?

8. Where are the sick immigrants being cared for?

9. Why are local citizens afraid? If you were living at this time, how would you feel?

10. What has happened to the doctors treating the sick?

11. What is the attitude of the person writing this article?

