



Salute To Veterans

Camp Fire USA has supported the Salute to Veterans since 1975, in cooperation with the Veterans Administration (VA). The activity is an opportunity for youth to be part of an interesting, patriotic, and inspiring endeavor. This project has been very successful, and participation has been great!

The purpose of the Camp Fire USA Salute to Veterans project is to help youth learn about veterans, develop a sense of caring, and give service to others. This project takes place around Valentine's Day as part of the Department of Veterans Affairs National Salute to Veterans Week. Youth participating in all Camp Fire programs, including club, after-school, and camp, are eligible to complete the project activities. The project sheets and resource information are available in this document as well as on the Camp Fire Compass. A recognition emblem and national project beads are available on Camp Fire's Online Store for those wishing to award youth who complete the project.

The Department of Veterans Affairs National Salute to Veterans Week will be observed February 12–18, 2012. The salute always occurs the week of Valentine's Day. This time of year was selected to honor veterans because the sentiments of caring and sharing match the purpose of expressing honor and appreciation to hospitalized veterans. The Department of Veterans Affairs defines this week as an opportunity to:

- Pay tribute and express appreciation to veterans.
- Increase community awareness of the role of the VA medical centers.
- Encourage citizens to visit the hospitalized veterans and become involved as volunteers.

More information about this project can be found at <http://www.volunteer.va.gov/NationalSaluteVeteranPatients.asp>.

Some councils have developed partnerships with local military bases, troop support groups, state hospitals, and nursing homes. Council staff may choose to work with any organization that serves veterans. This is a flexible project. The VA has informed Camp Fire USA that some of the hospital facilities have closed. It is recommended that council staff contact the facilities and organizations to find out if they are interested in Camp Fire USA participation. To locate a Veterans hospital, go to www.va.gov, and click on "Locations." Another source for contacting veterans is the local Veterans of Foreign Wars post, or visit the national website, www.vfw.org, for other options.

If the VA facility has a P.O. box address, do **NOT** use any of the overnight delivery shipping systems, because they do not deliver to P.O. boxes.

As citizens of the United States, we have many freedoms that people in other countries do not have. We have opportunities and luxuries that make our lives and our youth's lives much better and easier. For that reason, since 2002 Camp Fire USA has added more civic-related issues to the project in hopes that participating youth will gain more awareness of how everyone can make a difference by becoming more knowledgeable and sensitive to his or her civic responsibility. The many possible activities include having the youth write essays or

learn the complete history of the American Flag; asking participants what they think about the American wars and the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall and holding a group discussion on the number of casualties of each war; and requesting that youth do research on the United States Congress as well as government in general.

Suggested Activities

- Learn about memorials to veterans. For example, find information about the Vietnam Veterans Memorial on its website, www.nps.gov/vive/index.htm.
- Sing along to the patriotic songs or explore the youth resources at www.usa-flag-site.org.
- The flag of the United States of America is our national symbol. Find out more at www.usflag.org. You can even learn to say the Pledge of Allegiance in various languages.
- Explore America Online's National Student/Parent Mock Elections. Millions of students, parents, and educators in all 50 states and Washington, D.C., as well as 14 countries/territories around the world have participated. Check the website for dates: www.nationalmockelection.com/about_nspme.html.
- Learn more about how we remember and honor past veterans, presidents, and historical figures by visiting the Arlington National Cemetery website, www.arlingtoncemetery.org/historical_information/index.html.
- Find out what other people are doing to support the troops and join them by donating airline miles to help reunite returning military men and women with their families, supporting scholarship funds, or sending support to wounded service members. See how you can help at www.OurMilitary.mil.
- Sending care packages and cards and writing letters have become popular ways to thank active armed forces. For care packages, check www.operationmilitarypride.org/. Due to security reasons, the Department of Defense has strict guidelines for care packages and letters; be sure to follow those guidelines. The package or letter **HAS** to be addressed to an individual service person, **NOT** to "Any Service Member."
- Reach out to military families in your community, especially those with loved ones in other countries. More than 300,000 service members are deployed overseas.
- Donate to Operation USO Care packages. Go to www.uso.org, and click on "Programs."

You can access information through www.google.com on the following issues by entering the underscored words.

- Veterans Day: Also known as Armistice Day and Remembrance Day, November 11 is a day set aside to honor all veterans of the armed forces.
- Desert-Storm.com: This site was created by students to honor those who participated in Operation Desert-Storm.
- Events of the Korean War: Find information about the Korean War, which lasted from June 25, 1950, to July 27, 1953, and claimed the lives of 3 million Koreans and over 50,000 American soldiers.
- John's Word Search Puzzles: Learn about our heroes by finding words in a word search.
- Memorial Day: Get some history behind the holiday that commemorates our loved ones.
- Activities for Veterans Day: Find ideas for communities and/or different groups to celebrate Veterans Day.
- The Great War: Access maps, highlights, a timeline, and interviews about the events of World War I.
- USS Arizona Memorial: Learn about this floating memorial to the men who lost their lives at Pearl Harbor in World War II.

CAMP FIRE USA NATIONAL PROJECT

SALUTE TO VETERANS



PURPOSE: Help youth learn about veterans, develop a sense of caring for others, and give service to others.

REQUIREMENTS

Youth complete the following two requirements. Generally the requirements can be completed in two meetings:

1. Who are Veterans?
2. Valentines for Veterans

Requirements can be altered or substituted according to the needs, interests, and ideas of the group. A participating youth receives one national project bead (B07303) after each requirement is completed. A youth who completes two requirements receives the Salute to Veterans recognition emblem (B12000).

TIPS FOR GROUP LEADERS

- This project is administered with the cooperation of the Veterans Administration (VA) in Washington, D.C. All valentines are sent to

council offices and then to the VA hospitals all across the country.

- If a VA hospital is located in the council's area, making a visit is encouraged. Youth can learn a great deal about veterans by actually visiting a hospital. Find out if the VA hospital in your area will allow visitors. If a hospital is not available, you may contact your local Veterans of Foreign Wars post.
- Contact your council regarding deadlines, information on materials, and how to distribute the valentines.
- Check with your council before doing any activities shown on the list of options. Some of these activities may not be suitable for the VA hospital in your area.

PROJECT OUTCOMES

Activities in this project relate to Camp Fire USA's standards for program philosophy.

Youth will:

Work together to create something.
Suggest options.

Share ideas and feelings.

Express themselves through words and pictures.
Learn about veterans.
Do something for others.

Learn that all racial/cultural groups defend the country.

Learn about peace.
Learn about careers.
Learn about citizenship.
Make valentines.

Camp Fire USA's program outcomes:

Increased knowledge and application of governance process and teamwork.

Increased planning and decision-making skills.

Greater self-awareness (identity, self-esteem).

Increased appreciation and respect for others.

Increased competency in and appropriate application of basic learning skills.

SALUTE TO VETERANS



Meeting Plan – Who Are Veterans?

PURPOSE: Teach youth what veterans did for this country and what it means to give service to others.

MATERIALS

Sample of emblem B12000, crayons or markers, one piece of 8½" x 11" paper for each child.

Optional: A variety of building materials (spoons, paper, string, yarn, wood, paper cups, fabric, building blocks, boxes, etc.).

PREPARATION

Check on council procedures for this project. The group could invite a veteran to this meeting. Check to see if there is a veteran among the families of the group.

There are many activities in this meeting plan; choose the ones most appropriate for your age group.

ACTIVITIES

Veterans

Ask the youth, "What is a veteran?" (Men and women who have served this country in the Armed Forces, such as the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines, or Coast Guard.) Point out that veterans are people who have defended our country so that everyone could live in peace. Emphasize that veterans are people of all races and nationalities.

Ask the youth if they know anyone who served in the military in Vietnam, Korea, Desert Storm, Afghanistan, or Iraq. Once these people retire from or leave the military, they are considered veterans.

Patriotism

Talk about how veterans believe in patriotism, citizenship, freedom, and compassion. Give the youth a chance to express their ideas as to what these concepts mean and talk about how they relate to the youth's own experiences. What does being patriotic mean? (Loving one's country, rather similar to loving your group and feeling that it is special.) What are some things that are patriotic? (Saluting the flag, saying the Pledge of Allegiance.) What does it mean to be a citizen? (Caring about

what happens around you, such as taking part in the activities of the group, helping to make it better.) What is freedom? (Being able to make decisions. The youth make choices about the group and what they want to do.) What is compassion? (Caring about others.)

Peace

Ask the youth, "What is the meaning of *peace*?" Can they remember a time when they felt peace? What were they doing? Playing a game? Making something with their friends? Were they outside? With people in their families? If the youth do not know what you mean by peace, ask them to remember a time when they felt happy, strong, helpful or good about themselves. Avoid defining peace as a particular behavior. Emphasize that peace is personal.

As you discuss peace, encourage the youth to talk about their everyday feelings of peace. Ask the youth if they feel peace when they help their brothers, sisters, or friends. Explain that doing something helpful is a good way to experience peace.

Picture

Ask each child to draw or paint a picture illustrating one of these concepts and what it means to him or her. This will give them a better idea of the meaning of this project. Discuss what they draw.

Being in the Hospital

Explain that one way to be in contact with veterans is through a local Veterans Administration (VA) hospital. If you have a VA hospital in your area, identify someone from the group to interview a patient. Ask what it is like to be hospitalized. What can patients do when they are in the hospital? What can't they do? Ask if any of the youth have ever been in the hospital. Have they ever visited anyone in the hospital? What is something nice they can do for someone in the hospital?

Explain that not all veterans are in the hospital, but the ones who are enjoy getting special things. Stress that a veteran is not always in the hospital because of a war injury but could be there for another reason. Act out an impromptu skit or pantomime about how a veteran in the hospital might feel when he or she receives a valentine from a Camp Fire USA youth.

Valentines

Point out that at the next meeting time the group is going to make valentines for veterans. If there is no VA hospital in your area, you might want to find other ways to support veterans. As an alternative, have the group visit a Veterans of Foreign Wars post or send valentines to active servicemen and servicewomen. (See enclosed information.)

Ask the youth to suggest different kinds of valentines to make for the veterans or for armed services personnel. Talk about the materials the group would like to use to make the valentines. Explain that at the next meeting you will bring these materials and the youth will create their own valentines and write letters to the veterans.

Ceremony

Pass the Salute to Veterans recognition emblem around the group. Point out that they will receive emblems for making their valentines for the veterans. Tell them that the emblems will show that they are thoughtful and caring and that they each made somebody very happy.

Ask the youth to help you plan a ceremony in which they can receive their emblems. The ceremony will be held during the closing of the next meeting, after they have made their valentines.

Remember, the ceremony does not have to be elaborate. The group plans it, and that makes it special. Songs, special words, lighting candles, reciting the Camp Fire USA Law, and forming a friendship circle are just a few ideas for a ceremony.

PLAYBACK: POINTS TO REINFORCE

- What are some things you learned about veterans?
- What will you tell your family about a veteran?

SALUTE TO VETERANS



Meeting Plan – Valentines for Veterans

PURPOSE: Help youth make valentines and write letters to veterans.

MATERIALS

One 9" x 12" piece of red construction paper for each child, a variety of items to decorate valentines (scrap lace, doilies, yarn, fabric), paper for letters, markers or crayons, pencils, emblems, masking tape, scissors, glue.

Optional: Cloth for blindfold.

PREPARATION

Optional—Make heart patterns out of large sheets of paper.

ACTIVITIES

Explain to the youth that today the group will be making special valentines for veterans. Ask them if they remember what a veteran is. Why is it important for the group to be making these valentines for the veterans? How do they feel when they are helping others?

Point out that when they finish their valentines, they will write special letters to send with their valentines (optional). Explain that the veterans love to get letters from boys and girls. It means a lot to them to know that people care about them. Some of the veterans are lonely and do not get very much mail, so it makes them happy when they do receive some. Point out that people often think of others only on birthdays or holidays. They forget that people like to be remembered at other times, too.

Individual Valentines

Discuss the information that is to be included in the letters. Ask the following questions:

- How should you begin your letters? Appropriate greetings are "Dear Veteran," "Dear Friend," or even "Hi."
- What could you say to the veterans to help them feel better?

- What could you tell them about yourselves? Encourage the youth to talk about hobbies, school, pets, and being members of a Camp Fire USA group.
- How should you sign your letters? (The youth are to sign their letters with **only their first names** and the group name.)

Do not let the youth put their addresses on the letters. Medical centers for veterans or military posts do not allow letters with return names or return addresses to be delivered. This rule is for the safety of the youth, medical centers, and patients themselves.

Give any instructions needed to help them make their valentines. If young youth are making card-type valentines, their letters can be written inside. Older youth may need separate sheets of paper, because their letters may be longer.

When the youth have finished, talk about the valentines and letters. What did they say in their letters to make others feel better? What are some special things about the valentines that will make the veterans happy? What did they say about themselves in their letters?

Group Valentine

With the scraps left over from making valentines, the youth will make group valentines. Divide the group into smaller groups of three or four youth. Give each group one large piece of construction paper.

Ask that one of the youth in each group cut out or draw one heart the size of the paper. Younger youth will need hearts traced in advance.

The groups choose materials from the leftover scraps to decorate and glue on the group hearts. Each member of a group can make one decoration for the heart, or the group can make something together. When the groups are finished, have a

contest and let the youth choose the funniest, most unique, or most colorful heart.

A variation of this activity is to have each member of the group make a small decoration but not glue it on the group heart. Each group then hangs its heart on the wall using masking tape. Make sure it does not damage the wall.

The members of each group line up facing their group heart. The youth place tape on the backs of their decorations. Each child takes a turn placing his or her decoration on the heart while blindfolded. After all the hearts have been decorated, choose the funniest, unique, or most colorful heart.

These valentines can be included with the valentines being sent to the veterans. They can be used as decorations at the hospital.

PLAYBACK: POINTS TO REINFORCE

- What special feeling do you get from helping others?
- How do you think the veterans will feel when your valentines arrive?

CLOSING

Close with the emblem ceremony the youth planned in the first meeting.

Decorations

Make posters, placemats, wall hangings, or displays with a Valentine's Day theme for wards, lobbies, auditoriums, and cafeterias. Use heart shapes and write greetings to the veterans. Displays about Camp Fire USA's history, council activities throughout the year, and youth involvement in the project might be created for the lobby. The group should consult with the Chief of Voluntary Service before planning these decorations.

Reading Materials

Collect paperback books and magazines to donate to the hospital or Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) post.

Skits, Puppet Shows, Musical Programs

Camp Fire USA may want to be part of the Salute to Veterans entertainment in the hospital's auditorium on February 14. Strolling musicians or folksingers for the wards are always popular with the veterans. Again, check with the Chief of Voluntary Service before planning these activities.

For more information, do a search of your own using key words, such as veterans, VFW posts, patriotism, and Veterans Day.

For even more ideas, visit the following sites:

- www.usflag.org
- www.vfw.org
- www.usa-flag-site.org
- www.arlingtoncemetery.org/historical_information/index.html

Gift Items

All of the following have been made and/or distributed by councils for Salute to Veterans celebrations:

- Letters
- Tray favors
- Placemats
- Wall hangings
- Paperback books
- Entertainment
- Handkerchiefs
- Pencils
- Sachets
- Eyeglass cases
- Plants
- Games
- Dominoes
- Valentines
- Posters
- Bookmarks
- Mobiles
- Magazines
- Songs
- Skits
- Toilet articles
- Cards
- Score pads

TIDBITS

Following is miscellaneous information about the armed forces and civic-related facts. This information can be found on websites. Please remember that in some cases, you will need authorization from the sites to reproduce any documents.

THE FLAG

- The design of the flag has seven red and six white stripes.
- One red stripe must be at the top and one at the bottom.
- The union square colored or navy blue must fill the upper left quarter of the flag from the top to the lower edge of the fourth red stripe.
- The stars have one point up.
- The stars must be in nine horizontal rows.
- The odd-numbered rows have six stars.
- The even-numbered rows have five stars, centered diagonally between the stars in the longer rows.
- The flag is folded into a triangular shape to symbolize the shapes of the cocked hats worn by soldiers of the American Revolution.
- The first time the American Flag flew in a Flag Day celebration was in 1861.
- Pennsylvania is the only state that recognizes Flag Day as a national holiday.

Legend has it that three members of a secret committee from the Continental Congress visited upholsterer Betsy Ross with a request to sew the first flag for a new country. She finished the flag in either late May or early June 1776. In July, the Declaration of Independence was read aloud for the first time at Independence Hall. Amid celebration, the Liberty Bell tolled, heralding the birth of a new nation. The simple design made by Betsy would become a national treasure.

June 14 was chosen to respect the anniversary of the official adoption of the flag. President Woodrow Wilson officially established Flag Day in a proclamation made on May 30, 1916, but it was not celebrated until President Harry S. Truman signed an Act of Congress on August 3, 1949, that designated Flag Day as an annual national holiday.

Until that time, colonies and militias used many different flags.

“THE STAR-SPANGLED BANNER”

It was the valiant defense of Fort McHenry by American forces during the British attack on September 13, 1814, that inspired 35-year old poet-lawyer Francis Scott Key to write the poem, which was to become our national anthem. The poem was written to match the meter of the English song “To Anacreon in Heaven.” In 1931, the Congress of the United States of America enacted legislation that made “The Star-Spangled Banner” the official national anthem.

Francis Scott Key, son of an established Maryland family, was born on August 1, 1779, in Frederick, Maryland, on the family estate of “Terra Rubra.”

By 1805, Key had established a law practice in Georgetown, and by 1814 had appeared many times before the U.S. Supreme Court. The site of his house on M Street is now a memorial park.

After the war, Key served as a United State District Attorney and continued his association with the Episcopal Church, writing several hymns. On January 11, 1843, he died of pleurisy. He rests in Mount Cemetery in Frederick, Maryland. The flag he so honored flies day and night as a reminder of those events in September 1814 that gave birth to our anthem and pride in our nation.

“TAPS”

“Taps” is a beautiful bugle call. Played slowly and softly, it has a smooth, tender, and touching character. The bugle call was written in 1862, during the Peninsula Campaign of the Civil War, by General Butterfield, with an assist from his bugler, Oliver W. Norton.

“Taps” went on from this origin as an alternative to “Lights Out” to become not only a signal that day was done but also to say goodbye to fallen comrades.

“Taps” is customarily played during funerals at Arlington National Cemetery as well as during ceremonies at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. Its composer is buried in the Post Cemetery of the United States Military Academy at West Point (even though he did not graduate from the Academy).

THE PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

On September 8, 1892, a Boston-based youth magazine, *The Youth’s Companion*, published a 22-word recitation for school youth to use during planned activities the following month to commemorate the 400th anniversary of Christopher Columbus’s discovery of America. Under the title “The Pledge of the Flag,” the composition was the earliest version of the “Pledge of Allegiance.” A month later, more than 12 million school youth recited the words for the first time in schools across the nation. However, like anything new, it took many years to “reach maturity” and underwent changes along the way.

Francis Bellamy and James Upham planned the Columbus Day celebration. To this day, it is unknown which of the two men actually authored the words that first appeared in *The Youth’s Companion*.

The last change in the “Pledge of Allegiance” was made on June 14 (Flag Day), 1954, by President Dwight D. Eisenhower. The 23 words that had been initially penned for a Columbus Day celebration now comprised a 31-word profession of loyalty and devotion to not only a flag but also a way of life...the American ideal.

NATIONAL SYMBOLS OF FREEDOM

STATUE OF LIBERTY, New York

The Statue of Liberty was a gift to the United States from the people of France as a lasting memorial to independence, thereby showing that the French government was also dedicated to the idea of human liberty.

Construction for the Statue started in France in 1875. The Statue was titled “Liberty Enlightening the World.” The sculptor, Auguste Bartholi, was a quartermaster to a force of 5,000 soldiers. The structural engineer was Gustave Eiffel, and the process of fabrication was the repousse process. The statue was completed in Paris in June 1884 and presented to America by the people of France on July 4, 1884. The statue was dismantled and shipped to the United States in early 1885. President Grover Cleveland accepted the statue on October 28, 1886.

A renovation took place in 1984–1986. A team of French and American craftsmen worked in and around the statue, repairing popped rivets and replacing the corroded iron ribs with stainless steel. They strengthened the arm, incorrectly installed in 1886. French metal crafters replaced the old flame, lit from inside, with a cold-plated flame lit by reflection, in keeping with the sculptor’s original conception.

WASHINGTON MONUMENT, Washington, D.C.

The monument was built at intervals between 1848 and 1885 with funds from public subscriptions and federal appropriations. Memorializing George Washington's achievements and unselfish devotion to principle and to country, the memorial shows the gratitude of the people of the United States to the father of their country and their living faith in the cause for which he stood.

On July 4, 1848, the cornerstone was laid. The trowel was used by Washington at the laying of the cornerstone of the Capitol in 1773. The monument was not completed until 1884, almost 30 years after the architect's death, due to lack of funds and the intervention of the Civil War. A difference in shading of the marble (visible approximately 150 feet up) clearly delineates the initial construction from its resumption in 1876. The total cost was \$1.2 million.

NATIONAL WORLD WAR II MEMORIAL, Washington, D.C.

The World War II Memorial honors the 16 million people who served in the armed forces of the United States, the more than 400,000 who died, and all who supported the war effort from home. Symbolic of the defining event of the twentieth century, the memorial is a monument to the spirit, sacrifice, and commitment of the American people. The monument has a registry of Americans who contributed to the war effort.

THE VIETNAM VETERANS MEMORIAL, Washington, D.C.

Jan Scruggs, who served in Vietnam as an infantry corporal, founded the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. This memorial serves as a testament to the sacrifice of American military personnel during the Vietnam War. The memorial consists of three distinct sections: "The Wall," the three servicemen statue and flagpole, and the women in service to the Vietnam War statue.

On March 11, 1982, the memorial design and plans received final federal approval, and work at the site started on March 16, 1982. The memorial was completed in late October and dedicated on November 13, 1982. The Vietnam Memorial Fund raised nearly \$9 million entirely through private contributions from corporations, foundations, unions, veterans, civic organizations, and more than 275,000 individuals.

An undergraduate of Yale University, Maya Ying, born in Ohio, designed the Wall. Her parents fled from China in 1949. The Wall seems to stretch into the distance, directing toward the Washington Monument in the east, and the Lincoln Memorial to the west, thus bringing the Memorial into a historical event.

There are 58,261 names listed on the Memorial. More names can be added on Memorial Day if the Department of Veterans Affairs receives additional information. Approximately 1,200 of these names are listed as missing MIAs, POWs, and others. The names are listed first in chronological order, according to the dates of casualty, and then in alphabetical order.

ELLIS ISLAND, New York

The island was named for Samuel Ellis, a New York land developer who bought it in 1782. Formerly known as Oyster Island, it was acquired by the State of New York in 1808 for \$10,000. On January 1, 1892, the island became an immigration station. Five years later, the building burned down. On December 17, 1900, a new fireproof brick and stone facility was built. It was big enough to handle half a million immigrants every year.

Upon arrival at Ellis Island, immigrants had to go through seven steps before being admitted into the United States:

- Arrival
- Processing
- Medical Inspection
- Mental Testing
- Legal Inspection
- Detention
- Free to Land

Arrival: Ships dropped anchor outside the Narrows, where quarantine officers would come aboard to check for signs of epidemic diseases. If the ship was free of disease, doctors would then examine the passengers, most of whom were given permission to land. Most immigrants came by barge, and there were so many that it was almost impossible to turn around. Upon arrival, the gangplank was put down, and passengers were requested to put down their luggage. Men went one way; women and youth went the other way.

Processing: The inspectors determined each newcomer's eligibility to land according to United States law. For most immigrants, Ellis Island meant three to five hours of waiting for brief medical and legal examinations. For an unfortunate 2 percent, it meant exclusion and return to their homelands.

Medical Inspection: The inspection began as soon as the immigrants ascended the stairs to the Registry Room of the U.S. Public Health Service. If a doctor found any indication of disease, he marked the immigrant's shoulder or lapel (such as with an "L" for lameness or with an "E" for eyes), and a quick overall physical was given. Many were sent to the hospital for observation and care. Patients who recovered were usually allowed to land. Others, whose ailments were incurable or disabling, were sent back to their ports of origin.

Mental Testing: Nine out of ten immigrants were marked with "X" during the line inspection and were sent to the mental examination room for further questioning, where they had to answer a few questions about themselves. Out of nine immigrants held for this "weeding out" process, one or two usually would be detained for a secondary session of more extensive testing.

Legal Inspection: After the medical inspection, immigrants went to the inspector's desk for legal examinations to determine their social, economic, and moral fitness. The interrogation was over in a matter of minutes, after which an immigrant was either permitted to enter the United States or detained for a legal hearing.

Detention: During the peak years, immigration detention ran as high as 20 percent for all immigrants inspected. A detainee's stay could last days or even weeks. Many were women and youth who were waiting for relatives to come for them or for money to arrive. Others were waiting for hearings in front of the board of special inquiry or for final decisions from Washington, D.C. Perhaps the most poignant of the detainees were the families waiting for sick parents or youth to be released from the Ellis Island hospital.

Free to Land: After being inspected and receiving permission to leave the island, an immigrant could make travel arrangements to his or her final destination, get something to eat, and exchange their money for American dollars. Relatives and friends who came to Ellis Island for joyous reunions—often after years of separation—could escort the immigrants to their new homes. Immigrants boarded ferries to New York and New Jersey and, at last, were free to land in America.

In 1907, its peak year, Ellis Island processed over 1.2 million immigrants. By 1924, it had handled more than 16 million immigrants, 71 percent of all those arriving in the United States. By 1954, when it closed for good, over 40 million immigrants had passed through its gates. Today, 100 million Americans, roughly 40 percent of the population, can trace their roots through this 27.5-acre island!