

AN IMMIGRANT'S LETTER

Not all immigrants fared as well as this letter, written in 1845, suggests. But use this letter (condensed here) to get a sense of why so many wanted to come to America in this era.

In the following lines I intend, to the best of my ability, to give you a clear idea of the prospects that an emigrant may reasonably hope for here, compared to those he might expect in Norway during a similar period and under normal conditions.

Let us assume that a young, able-bodied man from the country, who has saved up a small sum of thirty or forty dollars, leaves Norway with the intention of emigrating to America. He then presents himself in the Great West with a few dollars in his pocket. His intention and wish must consequently be to get work, the sooner the better, and this he will soon be able to do by consulting those of his countrymen who arrived before him.

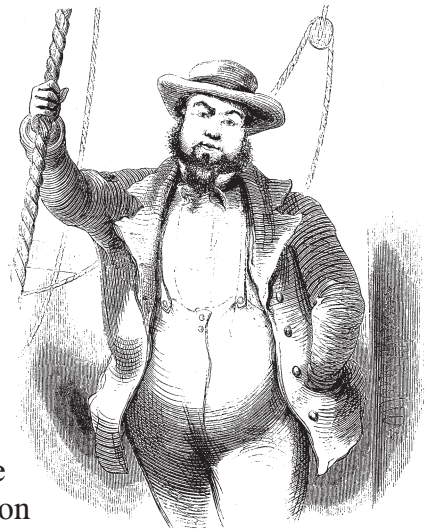
Depending on the time of year and other circumstances, his daily wage will be from 60 to 100 cents. Thus his average pay will be 80 cents, out of which he must subtract 30 for good board [food] and clothing, and in this way he has saved 50 cents a day.

If we figure that the number of working days is 250, at the end of the year he will have saved up \$120. If he gets permanent employment he will be paid by the current wages here, \$10 a month.

It is easily seen that after two years, this young man will have saved up \$200, and consequently for \$50 he can buy one sixteenth of a section, or forty acres of land.

For the rest of his money he will build houses, buy animals, farming tools and so on. Thus at the end of two years he has become an independent man and is in a position to marry without having to worry about himself or his family.

Now, if this young man had stayed in Norway, he would have been in about the same position as he was in the beginning.



For a laborer who has a wife and children the prospects are about the same. By washing, knitting, and other indoor work, the wife will always be able to make enough to support herself, and if she is good at this sort of work she can make much more. Every year new cities are founded, and these offer fine opportunities for beginning artisans [craftsmen].

We are well pleased with public administration [government] here, for neither taxes nor other burdens are weighing heavily on us. For a piece of land of forty acres a yearly tax of something over \$1.00 is paid.

The conduct of officials is, as might be expected in a truly free country, obliging, gentle, and polite to everybody, not the aristocratic, haughty, repelling kind of address that I met with on several occasions in my old native country.

Group Discussion: *What are the main steps an immigrant should follow to find success in America in 1845, according to this letter? What impresses this immigrant most about America and its government?*