

Young English Family Emigrates to USA – 1870

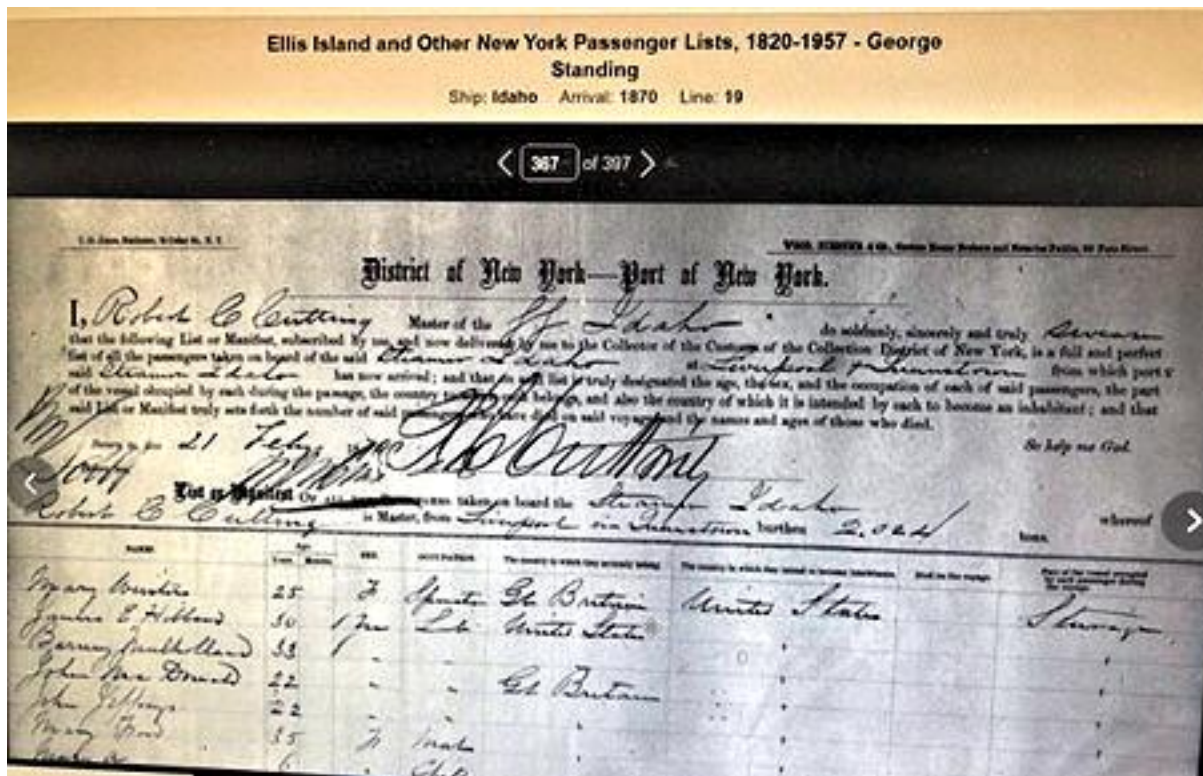
Early in February 1870, George Standing (39) and his wife Deborah took their five sons, all aged under 12, to the port of Liverpool where they embarked on the steamship Idaho, bound for New York to start a new life in the United States. We need to appreciate that they were leaving behind a settled, familiar life to undertake a perilous journey to a country which was recovering from a Civil War fought to determine whether it would be a Union or a confederation of independent States.

The Ship: ss Idaho

The Idaho was only built in 1869, but it was not an ocean liner. At 2,024 tons it was a very small ship by today's standards. In fact, it was no bigger than one of the ferries operating in New York harbour between Staten Island and Manhattan. It was designed for the job of transporting emigrants from the UK to New York. Cabins were available at an extra price for those travelling in "Saloon Class", but the vast majority of passengers bought tickets in "Steerage". Conditions would have been basic for those in Steerage, even though improvements would have been made by the time Titanic sailed on the same route 42 years later for her one and only (uncompleted) journey over the Atlantic Ocean.

The Passenger Manifest

The ship's captain, Robert Cutting, was obliged to "deliver to the Collector of Customs of the Collection District of New York a full and perfect list of all the passengers taken on board of the said Steamer Idaho at Liverpool and Queenstown from which ports said steamer Idaho has now arrived". The captain was also obliged to confirm "that on said list is truly designated the age, the sex, and the occupation of each of said passengers, the part of the vessel occupied by each during the passage, the country to which each belongs, and also the country of which it is intended by each to become an inhabitant; and that said list or Manifest truly sets forth the number of said passengers who have died in said voyage, and the names and ages of those who have died."

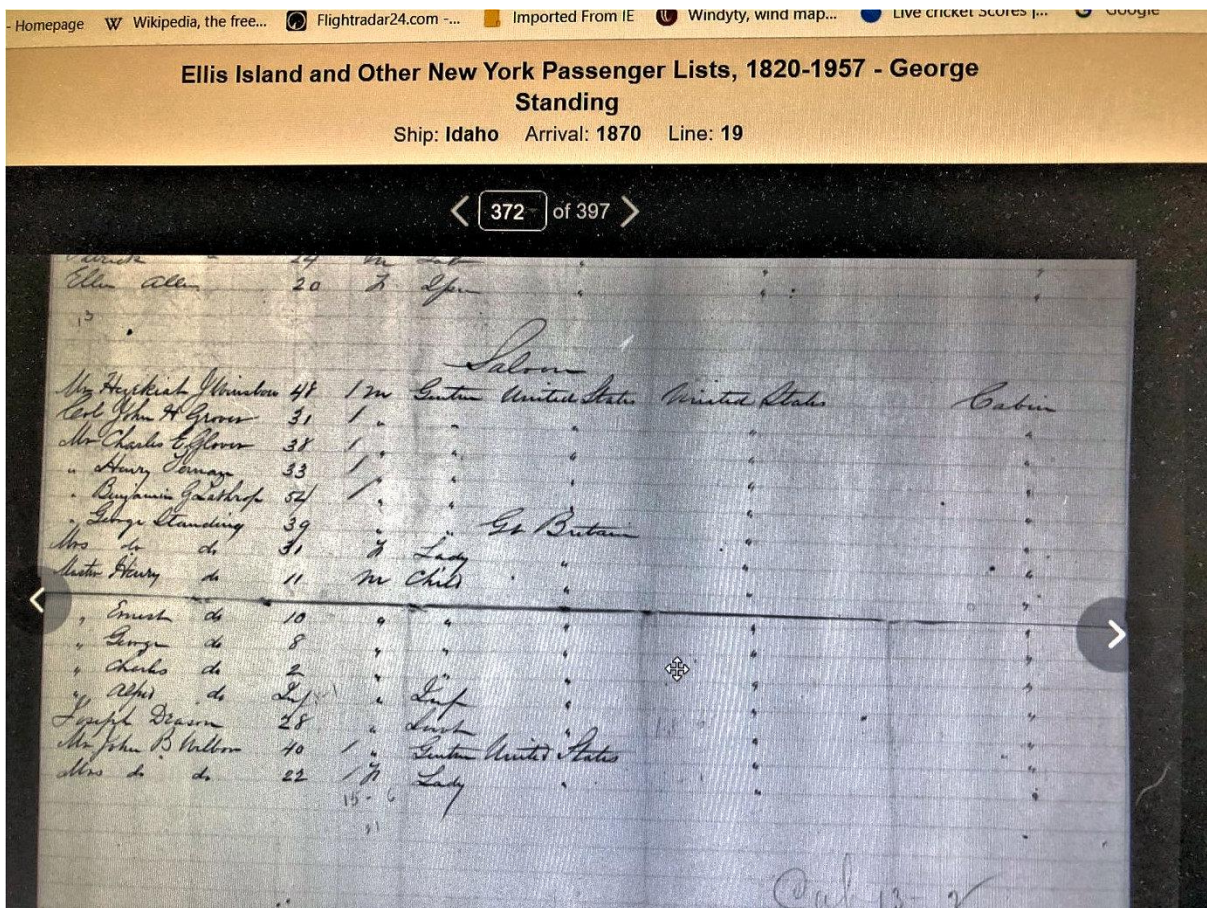


Steerage Passengers on the Idaho

There were 225 passengers recorded in the Manifest as travelling in Steerage: 166 of these were male and 59 female. 134 of the men are described as Laborers. There were 12 mothers, 43 children, and 11 infants. Nine of the women were accompanied by a husband, and 15 were described as spinster (unmarried). The only adult man not described as labourer was a 59-year-old seaman (who presumably worked for the shipping line and decided not to return on the homeward voyage). Life on board would not have been comfortable. Among the family groups was Sarah Shakespeare, a 35-year-old woman from England travelling with her six children all under the age of 12. We wonder how much rest she could have had on the trip, given that it was rough, and seasickness would have meant that poor Sarah would have had to clean up her children and feed them all on her own. We have to assume her husband had travelled on ahead to obtain accommodation in New York.

Saloon Class Passengers on the Idaho

There were only 15 passengers on this voyage who had the comparative comfort of a cabin. Apart from George and his family, the other 8 were Americans returning home from a visit to Europe. The Standing boys had no other children to play with, though we can imagine that they may well have made friends with some of the 43 other children travelling in Steerage. Here is a copy of the page from the Ship's Manifest showing the 15 Saloon Class passengers:



In this image we see that George Standing (a Gentleman) is 39, his Country of Origin is Great Britain, and his intended destination is shown simply as United States. Deborah (a Lady) is 31, and the children are Master Henry (11), Master Ernest (10), Master George (8), and Master Charles (2), while Master Alfred is described as an infant. Josiah is not on the list as he was not born until after the family arrived in Iowa.

Nationalities of the Passengers

Of the 225 passengers in Steerage 171 are described as being from Great Britain. No distinction is made between those who boarded in Liverpool and those who joined the ship at Queenstown (which is the old name for the port outside Cork on the south coast of Ireland) but, judging by their names, at least 51 of the 171 were from Ireland.

Also in Steerage were 24 Italians, 9 Germans, and 16 French, plus one lady from Sweden, and 4 returning Americans. These 49 passengers who came from other European countries must have travelled by ship from their home port (maybe Naples or Genoa, or Hamburg or Bordeaux) or across Europe by rail just to reach Liverpool. We can only imagine the problems faced by families needing to transport their treasured possessions with them. If we exclude the children and infants, the adult passengers had a remarkably young average age – most between 16 and 30, and only 9 aged 50 or above. The oldest was 59.

Arrival Formalities

It is unlikely that a visa was required to enter the US back in 1870, and we do not know about passports. We do know that the immigration authorities at Ellis Island were very concerned about the health of the new arrivals. Physical and medical inspections were rigorous and probably not “user-friendly”. Once the new arrivals had cleared Immigration, they were probably free to go into the city or meet up with relatives who had come to welcome them. And so their new life began.

We are fortunate that the internet has provided access to this level of detail to show how many ordinary people were prepared to undertake such a difficult journey to have an opportunity for a new life in the United States. We should recognise the courage and faith that led to such decisions and be proud of what George and Deborah achieved in the New World, and the legacy they left for those who followed.

David Cheal

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