

# *A TREASURE TROVE FROM ELLIS ISLAND*

The recent release of Ellis Island records, and the tremendous public response, underscores the fascination we all have with our “great - greats.”

We’ve found our people in censuses, church records, letters, newspapers and township ledgers. Village life in the old country was often replaced here by township communities, such as Canosia, that could respond to immigrant farmers who needed cartways, or a few dollars for road labor until the harvest.

Three of us compared notes about our ancestors. Some came through Canada, or Castle Garden in New York, which preceded Ellis Island. Several of our people came to Minnesota Territory and we have the old land patent papers signed by the President’s Secretary.

One person described a great-grandfather’s journal, written on the long journey aboard a wooden sailing ship across the Atlantic, that includes his prayer, “Almighty God spare me death from drowning.” In his final years, this immigrant wrote to his nephew back in the old country asking about dear friends left behind. The younger man replied, “I am my lone now. They have all gone to America.”

A second person described European ancestors, forced off their land, who found refuge in Canada, and even learned French in their new homeland. Then they came to Minnesota, acquiring many acres because land ownership, denied in the old country, was security. These families twice donated some of their land for local schools because education was the key to shaping a family’s destiny.

A third person, with an Ellis Island document, described a succession of related immigrant families coming to Duluth. It was hard work here on the coal docks, and not much easier building a sawmill, or cutting timber, or farming on rocky cutover land. The old photographs reveal little of the hardships, but even the younger generations are learning the old stories

As new technology enables us to probe further and reveal endless data, the true reasons for the exodus from Europe might become secondary. It was Oscar Handlin’s Pulitzer Prize book, “The Uprooted,” that spoke so strongly for the immigrant. . . “Yet looking at the old man’s bent head in the chair, who came so

far at such cost, the son knows at once he must not lose sight of the meaning of that immigrant journey.”