

Coming to America

In 1890, Anders Lian left Vaerdalen, Norway, for a new life in America. It was a rough passage. "For breakfast was bread and coffee," he wrote back to his parents, "for dinner rotten meat."

Dear parents,

Thursday about noon the steamship *Hero* left Trondhjem; it is just a little, if I can say, "cattle boat" — the provisions on board were terribly poor. The coffee was undrinkable; the treatment was tolerably good, but so cramped for room, between three and 400 passengers on board. I was reasonably well the whole way. . . . Many were very sick. England came into view Sunday afternoon, there were many ships to be seen. I was reminded of "By England's shore where the proud ships go," etc.

About 8:00 in the evening the ship docks. We stay on the ship overnight. Monday morning someone comes and hollers "Get off!" We take our bags and bedclothes and go down. The custom official shows up and everyone must open his food box and traveling bags for him. Do you have tobacco? Do you have snus? [Snus is a Scandinavian (commonly Swedish) tobacco product akin to snuff] Do you have cigars? They are the questions. Likewise about hard liquor. A person is allowed to take other things and as much as he wants. Now comes the chest and it undergoes the same inspection. Unbelievable mass of people. A boat came from Goteborg, Sweden, with 1,100 passengers. Suddenly someone comes and calls "Star Line follow this way." Likewise for the other lines, and

we follow him first to a refreshment place where we receive a little to eat and then on to a ticket office where we get a railroad ticket from Hull to Liverpool. Extreme crowding, all nationalities



It is about six hours from Hull to Liverpool and when we come to Liverpool we get out of the train and stand around a little while. Then the agents come and call for their own. When we hear "Star Line" we go along for a long distance up through the city where there is a hotel. A tremendous mass of people — all nation's Jews and Mohammedans [Muslims]? Now we get a little food, but not all of us get bed

room. We must go yet a long stretch up through the city and get quite a comfortable bed lodging last night until today. Now we have gone back to the hotel again. It is uncertain if everyone will get to come along over the Atlantic Ocean. How unpleasant it must be to stay here for a long time. I have not seen one wooden house since I set foot in England. Just stone houses, for the most part brick houses.

— Anders

Eau Claire 10 mai 90

Dear parents and brother!

I am now standing on America's freeborn earth! but *hutetu!* the trip was long and difficult. I assume you have received my letter from Liverpool.

It did not go as I supposed, as when we came to Liverpool the day before we were supposed to leave on the Star Line's ship *Britanica*. No, that was overfilled; about 400 people had waited eight days in Liverpool, and so of course they had to go first together with some Englishmen who had priority. We then were assigned to stay in Liverpool for eight days. Eight days in this unattractive city. Yes, what could we do? Liverpool is an exceedingly dark town with huge factories all over. You can believe there was much ill will toward the agents. However, we consoled ourselves that as long as we'd be

going on the *Majestic*, it would be all right after all, as it is one of the best ships which goes over the Atlantic Ocean.

Yes, we got to look around in Liverpool, it is a horrid life in the dark narrow streets, the worst is to see all the ragged, half-naked dirty children who roam around in the streets and steal tobacco. They want to have tobacco, you understand. Now it was the 21st when we came to Liverpool and were designated to stay there for eight days; we were also hardly satisfied that we would get to go on a good ship.

But what happens: the 24th of April we hear that we are going to be put on the Guion Line's ship, the *Arizona*. Now you can believe there was commotion and noise: "I have a ticket with the Star Line and I want to go on the Star Line!" Many were so angry that they could have torn the agents to pieces; a group of Swedes protested against going on the *Arizona* and remained in the hotel and waited for the *Majestic*. The Norwegians went with the *Arizona* . . .

We didn't have it very comfortable on board. The Star Line people were shoved down into a dark room in the foredeck next to Irish, Germans, Polish, Russians, Finns, Jews and yet others. You can believe they were not very clean people. The lice crawled back and forth on them and also other crawling creatures. It was fortunate there were twenty Norwegians together in the same section.

The food was pretty bad. I didn't taste coffee or tea. For breakfast was bread and coffee, for dinner rotten meat, potatoes and meatsoup; evening bread and tea. For my part I would have starved to death if I had not had food with me from home. At the

same time I must say that it all went well; I was healthy except for the first two days but it was lonesome; poor drinking water. One day was the same as another until the 5th of May when in the evening we saw land. On the 6th, the ship docked and we went on land. Now there was inspection with the chests which were opened and investigated. . . .

Now we are again quickly put on a row boat and land at Castle Garden. Here you can believe there were regulations and crowding. We walked down steps and steps (carrying our hand suitcases and bedding which a person cannot let go of), and we come to the ticket office; here the tickets are delivered and we get a proof-of-purchase instead. Terrible press. I have to go a long ways through the city (to the main office) and get my railroad ticket.

When this is finished we go again in a rowboat and are taken to the railroad station. But what happens here. Yes, my ticket is with another railroad than my comrades. I am taken on another rowboat and assemble with all kinds of unfamiliar people. Now we go with rowboats a long distance past the steamship dock and come to the railroad station. We go into the train compartment and then, in a whizzing hurry, go through a long tunnel to begin with. We travel the whole night of the 7th of May, and about 9:00 we change trains and go further to Ogdensburg (New York) where we get off. Are quickly put into rowboats over a flooded area (the St. Lawrence River!) and get on the train on the other side. It was then about 3:00 in the afternoon. At 6:00 we changed trains and again and now continue the trip the whole night. The 8th of May we continue until we come to

Sault Ste. Marie. Here we must get off and change tickets and continue the trip on the same train.

But here at Sault Ste. Marie I am unfortunate. Next to the ticket office is a store where I go in and buy myself a loaf of bread for twenty cents. I deliver a five dollar and receive the correct change again (four dollars and eighty cents), stick it in my coin purse in my pants pocket, take my baggage and go into the train car. Here I find my coin purse and money are gone. Somebody has, I dare say, had their fingers in my pocket. I can do nothing. I am, and will be, penniless. . . . Luckily I had my ticket and check in my pocket-book. Yes, now we continued the whole night until the morning of the 9th of May where we change trains at Cameron and now it isn't far to Eau Claire. It was not very pretty through Canada. I guess I would have seen more if I had been so lucky as to go by way of Chicago.

Now I come to the station "Eau Claire," but I stand here and don't know where I shall go. . . . I stand here quite bewildered.

Lian boarded at 725 Water Street in Eau Claire and went to work at the sawmills. He was paid \$36 a month, of which about one-third went for lodging. With a keen outsider's eye, Lian bore witness to many events in the Chippewa Valley, from the fireworks of his first Fourth of July to the tragedy of a river drowning to the strange events of the "Sawdust War."

These are only excerpts of the first of many letters he sent home. Those interested can find more of his letters dating from 1890 to 1898 in the manuscript collection of the Glenn Curtis Smoot Library and Archives. The library, inside CVM, is open from 1-5 p.m., and by appointment.