

## Journey to Pennsylvania, 1756

*Note: Gottlieb Mittelberger, a native of Germany, arrived in Pennsylvania in 1750 and stayed for four years before returning home. In 1756 he published an account of poor German immigrants who were sent to the colony as workers. In his pamphlet Mittelberger reported that these workers were rounded up by agents who made promises to them that they never intended to keep or just tricked them into sailing to America. In the passage below the author describes life in Pennsylvania for these German workers.*

After a long and tiresome voyage when the ships finally came in sight of land the passengers all creep from below deck to see the land in the distance. They weep for joy, and pray and sing, thanking and praising God for living through the voyage. The sight of the land makes the people on board the ship, especially the sick and the half-dead, alive again. They have suffered in silence during the voyage and are now shout and rejoice that they have reached land alive. But sadly there is more hardship ahead!

When the ships have landed at Philadelphia after their long voyage, no one is permitted to leave them except those who had the money to pay for passage. Others, who cannot pay, must stay on board the ships until they are purchased. The healthy are favored and purchased first. Those who are sick and miserable must often stay on board the ships docked at the city for two or three weeks before they are purchased. Some of the sick die waiting to be bought.

The sale of human beings in the market on board the ship is carried out in this way: every day Englishmen, Dutchmen, and prosperous Germans . . . come from Philadelphia and other places and go on board the newly arrived ship. Here they bargain with the workers to determine how many years they must work to pay for their passage from Germany to Pennsylvania. When they have come to an agreement adults sign a paper saying that they agree to work for three to six years to pay the debt. The stronger they are the less time they will have to work. But, young people from ten to fifteen years old, must work until they are twenty-one years old to pay off the debt.

Many parents must sell or trade away their children like so many head of cattle. The parents often do not know where their children are being taken . . . and usually do not see their children again for many years. Some never see them again.

Often whole families—husband, wife, and children—are separated by being sold to different people, especially when they did not have any part of their passage money.

If a husband or wife died at sea after the ship has sailed half the distance, the survivor has to either pay or serve time working not only for himself or herself but for the family member who died.

When a person has served his or her time working off the debt, he or she is allowed a new suit of clothes if it was agreed to. . . . In addition a man will get a horse and a woman a cow. Anyone who runs away because of bad treatment he or she will not get far. Laws have been made for such cases and a runaway is soon found and brought back. Anyone who returns someone that tried to run away is given a good reward.

If such a runaway has been away from a master one day, he or she must serve an additional week for punishment. If the runaway escapes for a week, he or she must serve an additional month. If gone for month before being returned, an additional half-year of work is added on to the agreement. If the master decides not

to keep the runaway after being returned to him, he may sell him or her for as many years as left in the agreement plus time for running away.

Considering what a person has to go through, let everyone stay in his own country and support himself and his family honestly. Besides, I say you are foolish if you are talked into leaving your homes by promises from these thieves. No one should believe that roasted pigeons will fly into their mouths in America or in Pennsylvania without their working for their food.

## Questions

1. Why would people agree to leave their homes to work in Pennsylvania?
2. What service did a person have to perform to pay for the passage over?
3. Why did the author write this pamphlet?
4. How did he describe life in Pennsylvania for the German immigrant?
5. How was the agreement the German worker had to make to pay for his or her passage different from that of an indentured servant in Virginia? How was it different from slavery?