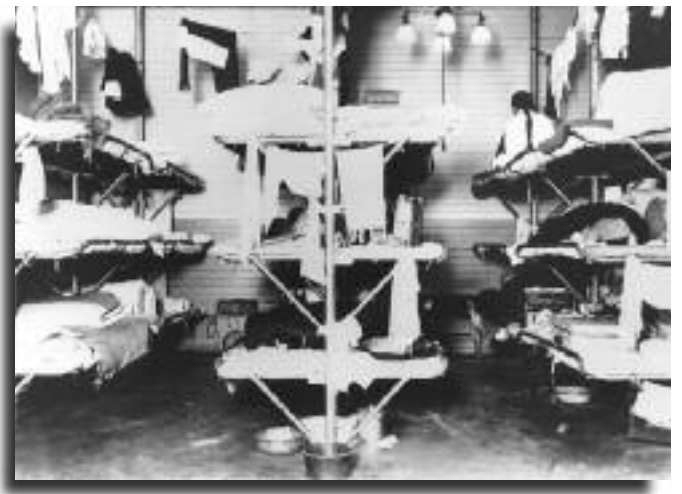


# ANGEL ISLAND

*A Historical Perspective*

Angel Island Association  
Angel Island Immigration Station  
Historical Station  
California Historical Society  
Paul Q. Chow



**Americans All®**

## Editorial and Advisory Staff

Paul Q. Chow has been instrumental in the developmental and educational activities of the Angel Island Immigration Station Historical Advisory Committee since 1973. A prominent guest lecturer, he has been involved in many other civic and community activities. He retired in 1988 after 35 years of service with the California Department of Transportation, where he held the position of associate transportation engineer. He is a Korean War veteran.

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Note: Biographical information was compiled at the time the individuals contributed to *Americans All*®.

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# Contents

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	Page
<b>Preface</b> .....	iv
<b>The Angel Island Immigration Station</b> .....	1
Entry to the United States .....	2
The Immigration Station .....	2
Detention Barracks Floor Plans .....	3
The Interrogation Procedure .....	6
Stories from the Interrogation Process .....	7
The Later Years .....	8
Angel Island State Park (map) .....	9
<b>Historical Highlights</b> .....	10
Building the Immigration Station .....	10
Pre-World War I .....	10
World War I .....	11
Post-World War I .....	11
World War II .....	12
Post-Military Period .....	12
<b>Student Background Essays</b> .....	13
<b>The Photograph Collection</b> .....	14
<b>Bibliography</b> .....	19
<b>Photo Credits</b> .....	Inside Back Cover
Front Cover .....	Inside Back Cover
Back Cover .....	Inside Back Cover
Text .....	Inside Back Cover
The Photograph Collection .....	Inside Back Cover
<b>Map Showing Location of Angel Island</b> .....	Back Cover

Today's youth are living in an unprecedented period of change. The complexities of the era include shifts in demographics, in social values and family structures as well as in economic and political realities. A key to understanding young people's place in both the present and the future lies in history. History is so much more than a collection of facts. When appropriately studied, it is a lens for viewing the motivations, beliefs, principles and imperatives that give rise to the institutions and practices of people and their nations. As our nation's schools reform their curricula to reflect the diversity of our school-age population, a major challenge arises. Is it possible to teach United States history as a history of diversity without evoking feelings of anger, bitterness and ethnic hatred? Is it possible to diversify classroom resources without generating feelings of separatism and alienation?

Americans All® answers "yes" to both these questions. The Americans All® program has proven that not only is it possible, it is preferable. By choosing to chronicle the history of six diverse groups—Native Americans, African Americans, Asian Americans, European Americans, Mexican Americans and Puerto Rican Americans—the program provides a frame upon which an inclusive approach to education on a nationwide basis can be built.

Nomenclature, regional differences, language and the demands of interest groups will always challenge an evolving diversity-based approach to education. These challenges are by-products of the freedoms that we treasure and strive to protect. This reality necessitates a process that becomes part of the product, however. Americans All® has integrated feedback from a diverse group of scholars in developing this program and maintains open lines of communication for continuous input from educators, parents and community members. The program's emphasis on six groups is based on historic patterns of migration and immigration. These six groups provide an umbrella under which many other groups fall. By developing 51 customized, state-specific resource packages, the continuing saga of diversity in the United States can and will be told.

Americans All® has succeeded in avoiding the land mines found in victim/oppressor approaches to our diverse history by using a thematic approach. The theme focuses on how individuals and families immigrated to and migrated through the United States (voluntarily and by force). Carefully planned learning activities engage teachers and students in comparative critical thinking

about all groups simultaneously. These activities ensure sensitivity to the previously untold stories of women, working-class people and minority and majority groups. Results from the program's implementation in ethnically and culturally diverse school systems confirm the efficacy of this approach.

We have answered "yes" to the frightening questions about teaching diversity without teaching hate. Our nation's leaders must now answer even more frightening questions: Can we afford not to teach history that is diverse and inclusive when school dropout rates range from 25 percent to 77 percent among Native American, African American, Asian American, Hispanic and foreign-born youth? Can we afford to continue preparing so many of our nation's youth for a future of exclusion from the economic mainstream—a future that mirrors a history curriculum that excludes them?

To compound the problem, we must add the very real constraint of urgency. The future of our nation is characterized by computer technology and global interdependence. All students, regardless of their gender or their socioeconomic, ethnic or cultural status, must be helped to see themselves as participants in this human continuum of scientific and mathematical development to both visualize and actualize a place for themselves in our future.

Students need to be challenged to think critically and examine how today's technology grew out of yesterday's industrial era, an era spawned by the agricultural accomplishments of prior generations. They need to understand that even the simple tasks of weaving fabric and making dyes from fruits or plants required mathematical and scientific understanding; that today's freeways grew out of yesterday's hand-hewn trails; that ancient tribal herbs from many cultures formed the basis of many of today's wonder drugs; and that it took the agricultural skills of many different peoples to produce the nucleus of today's complex farming and food industries. Students must also see the relationship between citizenship responsibilities and privileges and understand their own importance in that dynamic.

The Americans All® materials provide diverse and inclusive images of history that can be a catalyst for this type of understanding. Not only is it wise to teach about diversity, using an inclusive approach as modeled in the Americans All® program, it is essential.

Gail C. Christopher  
January 1992

# The Angel Island Immigration Station

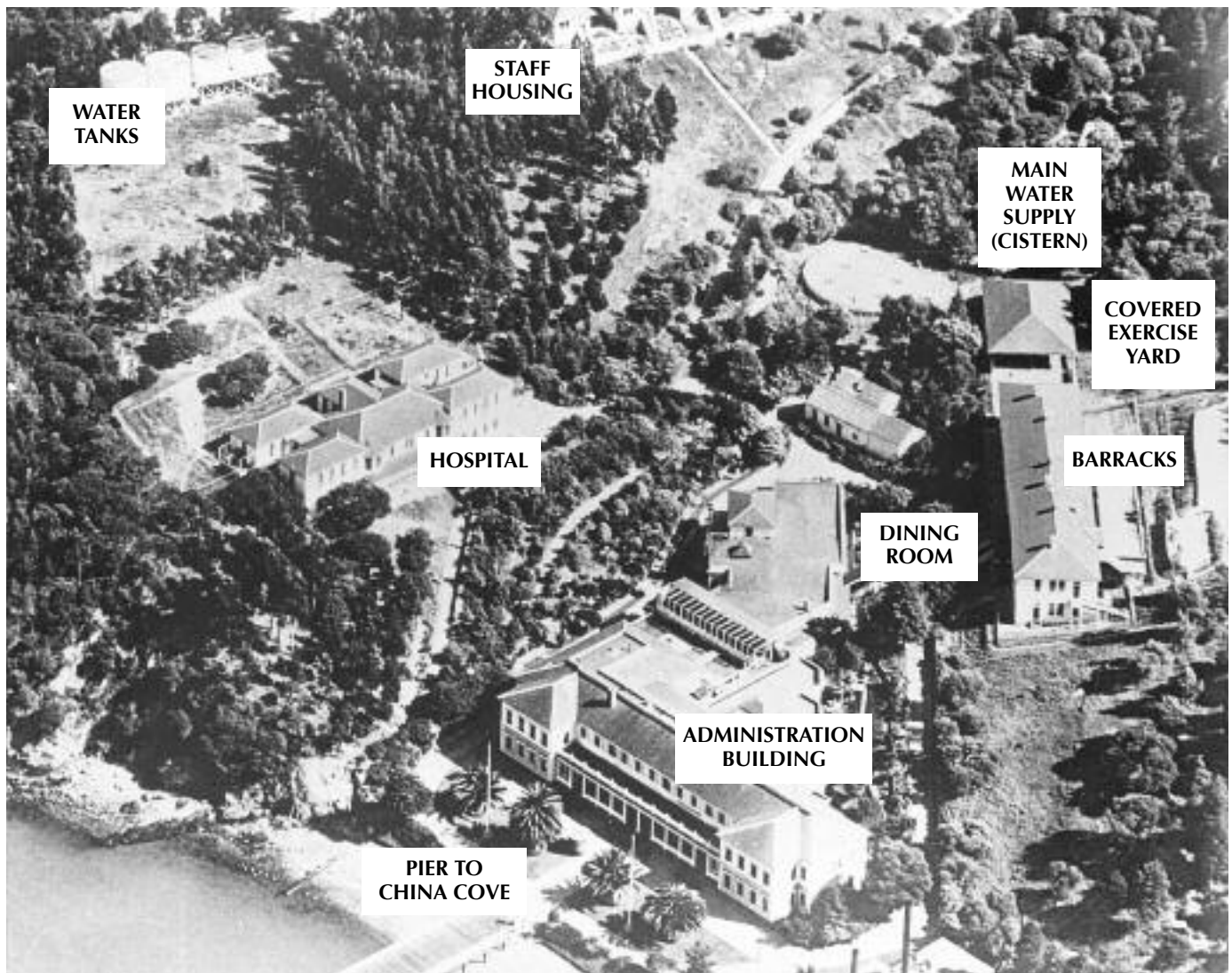
Because most European immigrants who came to the United States passed through the admission process on Ellis Island in New York harbor, the Ellis Island Immigration Station is a famous historic site. Yet it was not the only major port of entry for immigrants. Between 1910 and 1940, Angel Island in San Francisco Bay was the location of a large and imposing government compound where immigrants seeking entry into the United States via Pacific routes were processed.

Often referred to as the Ellis Island of the West, this one-mile-square state park is the largest island in San

Francisco Bay. It was christened Isla de Los Angeles by a Spanish explorer, Juan de Ayala, in 1775.

Native Americans had used the island for thousands of years. In the early 1800s, Russian sea-otter hunters visited it. In the mid-1800s, the United States government began developing the island. Gun batteries on Alcatraz and Angel Islands formed the inner defense of San Francisco Bay.

The island was a favorite dueling ground for San Franciscans during the mid-nineteenth century and was a military staging site during three wars.



*The Angel Island Immigration Station, c. 1910*

Of the 1 million immigrants processed at Angel Island Immigration Station, approximately 175,000 were Chinese and 117,000 were Japanese. Immigrants also arrived at Angel Island from India, Italy, Russia, Armenia and Ireland. The average length of stay for a detainee was two weeks; the longest was 22 months. Between 75 percent and 80 percent of the immigrants successfully entered America through this station.

## Entry to the United States

Gaining entry into the United States was complicated for the Chinese by the Chinese Exclusion Acts of 1882, 1888, 1892 and 1902 and the Immigration Act of 1924. These acts increased restrictions on Asian immigrants, especially laborers, until only students, teachers or merchants were admitted to America. Clearly discriminatory—no other national group was denied entry to the country—these exclusionary laws were prompted by racism and fear that laborers from China would take jobs away from European American workers. This fear was aggravated by a severe economic depression coupled with surges of new immigrants entering the United States from Europe.

Despite their early arrival in California and their contributions to the growth of the state, Chinese immigrants experienced growing prejudice in the 1870s. The first Chinese immigrants had worked in the gold fields. When the wealth from the gold fields diminished, Chinese workers were recruited to build the railroads linking the East and West Coasts. In time, Chinese people settled

into a variety of occupations in agriculture, fishing, business and light industry.

To enforce the Chinese Exclusion Acts, the federal government built the immigration station compound on Angel Island, chosen because it isolated the immigrants from their relatives and friends on the mainland. After the station was opened in 1910, immigration officials boarded ships arriving in San Francisco to inspect each passenger's documents. Those whose papers passed inspection were free to go ashore in San Francisco; those whose papers did not pass inspection were transferred to a ferry and taken to Angel Island.

## The Immigration Station

When the immigrants approached the station, they saw a beautiful island with wooden buildings. They were coming to *Gam Saan* (Gold Mountain) to realize their dreams. Today a large bell sits on the beach. It is the original fog-warning bell that sat at the end of the landing pier. Years ago, it disappeared from Angel Island and was found in a San Diego junkyard. The two-ton bell was restored and returned to the island, first to serve as a marker at Ayala Cove and later to sit at its present site in China Cove.

The immigration station extended from the pier to the top of the hill, where there was housing for station employees. A bustling center, it had its own power and lighting system, water system, dormitories, hospital, dining facilities, and staff home and administration facilities. It could handle up to 2,500 immigrants per day and had sleeping accommodations for 1,000. Of the 20 original buildings, only 4 remain: the mule barn or stable (later used for linen supply, a garage and housing for non-Asian cooks), the detention center, the hospital and the power station (a steam-generating plant). After the administration building burned in 1940, the homes of the immigration station staff were dismantled. The other buildings deteriorated, and all but the detention center are currently off limits to the public.

Men and women, in separate shifts, walked to the dining hall from the barracks through a covered passage. Today a granite monument stands near the site of the dining hall. The translation of the Chinese inscription on the monument is as follows:

*Leaving their homes and villages, they crossed the  
ocean  
Only to endure confinement in these barracks;  
Conquering frontiers and barriers, they pioneered  
A new life by the Golden Gate.*

—Ngoot P. Chin

On the hill behind deodar cedars was the hospital. It is closed now and awaiting funds for restoration. Behind the



*The original fog-warning bell now sits on the beach at Angel Island.*

hospital are two World War II prisoner-of-war barracks. Building 317 was known as the “detention barracks” (see the Detention Barracks Floor Plans on page 4). Still surrounded by a high barbed-wire fence, it was guarded from two watch towers. The second floor served as a federal penitentiary until Alcatraz opened in 1934. For many years hardened convicts were housed in the same buildings as the immigrants/detainees.

Today the women’s quarters houses a pictorial history of Chinese Americans during the past 100 years. Two of the original metal bunks have been reinstalled. The other 16 bunks are props that were created for the television film “Paper Angels.” Bunks were tiered three high and two across, so that six people could sleep between two poles. About 70 to 100 women and children could have lived there at one time. They were let out into a small exercise yard, but most of the time they remained in this small dormitory room or in the sitting room, which is the present reception area. In the early 1920s, the women and children were housed on the top floor of the administration building. Once a week, the men and women were escorted to a storehouse at the dock where they could select needed items from their luggage. Sometimes women and children were allowed to walk the grounds in a supervised group, but the men were confined to the barracks and the yard. All immigrants were subjected to medical examinations to determine whether they were carriers of communicable or infectious diseases. Chinese people, not used to this type of examination, found the physicals extremely embarrassing.

Privacy was minimal everywhere. The bathrooms never had any stalls. The women washed themselves from bowls at their bunks and under their clothes rather than in the showers. For women, deportation was more traumatic than for the men. Women could not, for instance, jump ship in a foreign port and earn the wherewithal to try again. The conditions of detention and facing the disgrace of returning to China could lead a detainee to choose to commit suicide in one of the two showers, and people spoke about suicides occurring, though there is no evidence in the historical record of people who chose this way to deal with their situation.

In the men’s barracks one can still see poems carved in the wood. The “poem room” contains the best-preserved carving, along with an English translation. This room was used as a toilet, bath and dressing room until it became too small. The poem on the bottom of page 5, like most of those on the barracks walls, is composed in the classical style of the Tang dynasty. Many of the men who passed through there were the brightest young men from their villages and they were reasonably literate, though without formal schooling beyond the primary grades. The women did not write any poems, or at least



*Immigrants’ dining room*

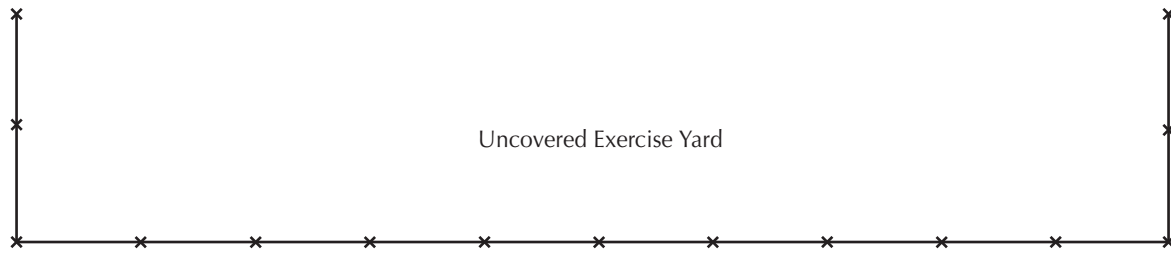
none that have survived. During this period most Chinese women did not have the opportunity to become educated. Also, for the last 20 years that the station was active, the women were housed in the administration building, which was later destroyed by fire.

The walls in the men’s quarters are covered with poems, but because the walls have been painted and repainted and many of the poems were composed with brush and ink, many were lost. Fortunately, two detainees in the early 1930s copied all of the poems then extant. Their copies yielded two-thirds of the 135 poems that have been recorded; most are unsigned and undated. They all have been published in *Island: Poetry and History of Chinese Immigrants Detained on Angel Island, 1910–1940* (Lai et al., 1980). Today English translations of some of the poems are next to the actual carvings.

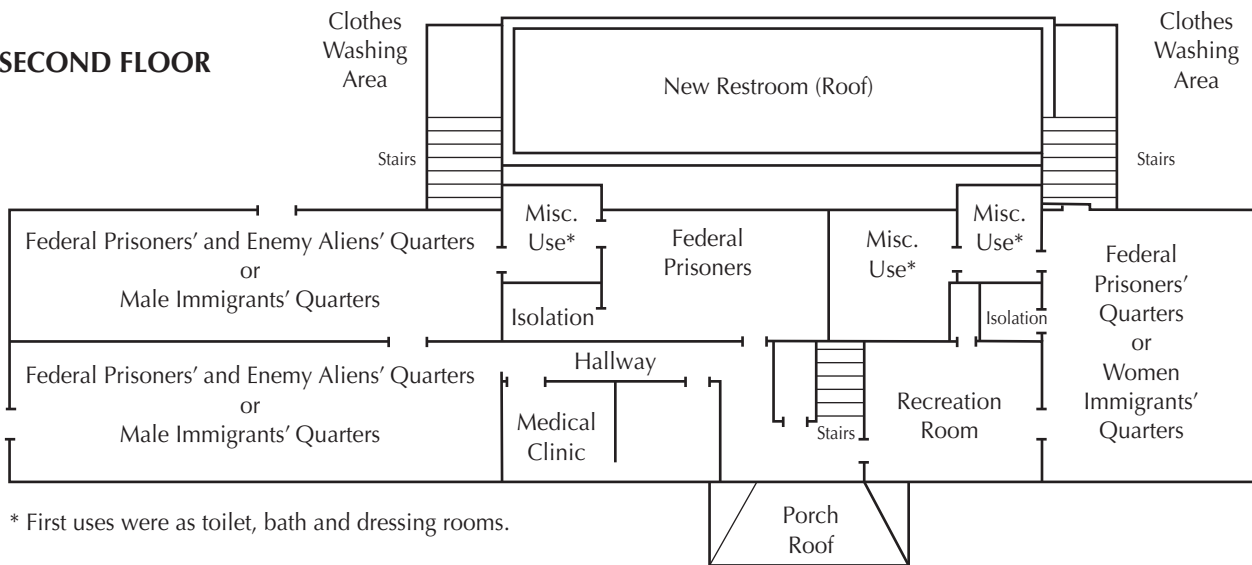
The men’s quarters could accommodate 200 detainees. Occasionally their frustration burst out beyond the confines of classical poetry. There were several minor revolts. The food was so bad in the early years that a riot broke out in 1919, and federal troops had to be brought in. Initially the problem was that huge steam tables were set up for preparing western-style stews, basic prison fare in the United States, and that was a cultural as well as a digestive shock for Chinese detainees.

In 1922 the men formed a self-governing association — *Zizhihui* or Angel Island Liberty Association. Officers were elected from those who had been detained the longest. Skits, concerts and operas were performed and classes were organized for the children. In addition to procuring books, records and recreational equipment, the association served as a link between detainees and the Chinese community. Messages were smuggled back

# Detention Barracks Floor Plans

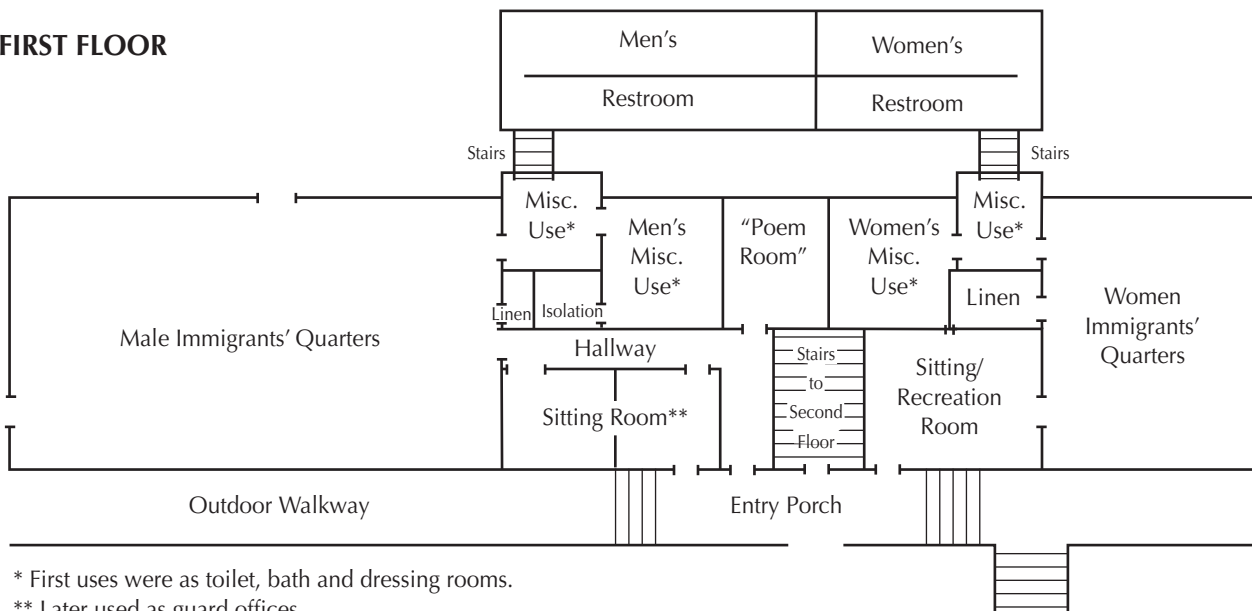


## SECOND FLOOR



\* First uses were as toilet, bath and dressing rooms.

## FIRST FLOOR



\* First uses were as toilet, bath and dressing rooms.

\*\* Later used as guard offices.



and forth via the kitchen staff, which was Chinese American. There was no such organization among the women, perhaps because of the services they received through Deaconess Katharine Maurer, a Methodist social worker.

Use of the second floor of the men's quarters varied considerably over the years. It housed federal prisoners before Alcatraz opened in 1934, including enemy aliens

during World War I, but at various times detainees were also kept upstairs. There is some Chinese calligraphy on the second floor and also writing in German, Russian, English, Japanese, East Indian and Arabic.

Reproduced below are translations of a few of the poignant writings found on the walls of Barracks 317, the Chinese detention barracks of the Angel Island Immigration Station. The authors remain unknown.

*The small building with three beams  
is just sufficient to shelter the body.  
It would be unbearable to tell the truth  
about the happenings on these slopes.  
Wait until the day I am successful  
and can fulfill my wish;  
I will not be benevolent and will  
level and uproot the station.*

*(The first four characters of the poem form a title:  
"The Island Awaits Leveling.")*

● ● ●

*Why do I have to sit in jail?  
It is only because my country is weak  
and my family is poor.  
My parents wait at the door in vain for news;  
My wife and child wrap themselves in their quilt,  
sighing with loneliness.  
Even should I be allowed to enter this country,  
When can I make enough to return  
to China with wealth?  
Since the ancient days, most of those  
who leave home become worthless;  
Heretofore, how many had ever returned  
from the wars?*

*My family is poor and suffers  
from shortages of firewood and rice.  
So I borrowed money to come  
to the Golden Mountains.  
But it is difficult to escape from  
the interrogation of the immigration officer.  
And I was sent to the island like a prisoner.  
Arriving here, I sighed deeply in a dark room.  
When a country is weak, others often  
treat it with contempt.  
She is like a domesticated animal  
passively awaiting destruction.*

● ● ●

*Detained in this wooden house  
for several tens of days  
Because of the exclusion laws.  
It's a pity heroes have no place  
to exercise their prowess.  
Waiting for news of my release,  
I am ready to snap my whip and gallop.  
All my kinsmen and housemates will be happy for me.  
But don't deny this Western grandeur,  
this imposing facade  
For behind the jade carvings, there lies a cage.*

*Several scores of days detained in this wood house  
all because of some inked rules  
which involved me.  
Pity it is that a hero has no way of  
exercising his power.  
He can only wait for the word to whip his horse on  
a homeward journey.  
From this moment on, we say goodbye to this house.  
My fellow countrymen here are rejoicing like me.  
Say not that here everything is Western styled.  
Even if it were built with jade,  
it has turned into a cage.*

Translation of the wall carving on the right.



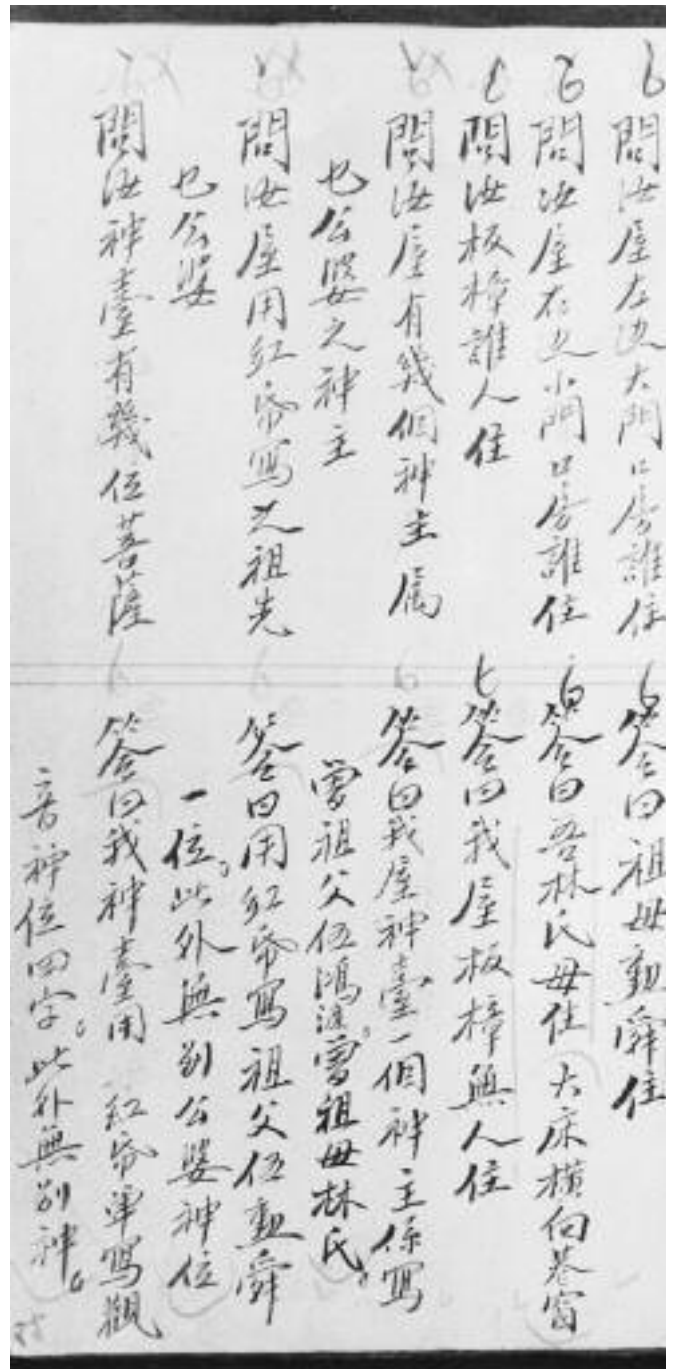
## The Interrogation Procedure

Language was an added problem for the detainees. The Immigration Service hired translators to aid in the interrogation proceedings. American-born Tye Leung Schulze, the first Chinese woman to vote in California, was hired as an assistant to the women in 1910. Deaconess Katharine Maurer, called “the angel of Angel Island,” traveled to Angel Island every day for 28 years. She worked to improve the daily lives of the detainees by providing them with a variety of goods and services. Despite such efforts, uncertainty and fear were the primary feelings of those in detention.

Although some Chinese sought entry into the United States in classes exempted by the exclusion laws (government officials, merchants, students and visitors), most claimed American citizenship by birth or derivation. More often than not, the detainees had no documents to prove either that they were born in the United States and were now seeking to return or that they were the legitimate relatives of American citizens. In the San Francisco earthquake and fire of 1906, almost all of the official records on the Chinese American community were burned. The authorities settled each claim to citizenship based on interrogations. Some Chinese took this opportunity to claim American citizenship by saying that they were born to a citizen but their birth records had been destroyed. Young people who immigrated with false papers claiming to be children of United States citizens were known as “paper sons and daughters.”

The interrogation experience was formal and frightening. After waiting for an indeterminate time to appear before the interrogation board, detainees were questioned in great detail about who they were and why they were claiming the right to enter the United States. The interview could last for hours or days. The board typically consisted of one or two immigration officials, an interpreter and a stenographer. The questions were asked in English and answered by the detainee in his or her native dialect. The answers given were compared with whatever information the Immigration Service had gathered about the detainee. Detainees whose answers failed to satisfy the officials were denied admission. The specter of deportation hung over the head of every detainee on Angel Island.

To prepare for the questions, immigrants often relied on a coaching book that contained details on the background of an individual who could legally claim American citizenship. Immigrants usually purchased such books as part of a whole package of tickets and information about entering the United States. The practice of memorizing coaching books developed as a consequence of the Chinese Exclusion Acts. People had to



A portion of a page from a coaching book

retain the name and identity of the person in their coaching book or risk being found out.

Opposition and protest against the detention conditions had been strongly expressed by the Chinese community from the moment the federal government had proposed building the immigration station on Angel Island. Unfortunately, petitions, lobbying, newspaper editorials and other efforts fell on deaf ears. Even the detainees registering their distress over the conditions by food riots and hunger strikes did not bring significant improvements.

## Stories from the Interrogation Process

“I was a lot more thorough than most inspectors. I gave them a pretty good examination, and that involved a lot of different angles. We started by getting the data on the applicant himself: his name, age, any other names, and physical description. Then we would ask him to describe his family: his father—his boyhood name, marriage name, and any other names he might have had, his age, and so forth. Then we would go down the line: how many brothers and sisters described in detail—names, age, sex, and so forth. Then we would have to go into the older generations: paternal grandparents; then how many uncles and aunts and they had to be described. Then the village: the district, how many houses it was composed of, how arranged, how many houses in each row, which way the village faced, what was the head and tail of the village. Then the next-door neighbors. Then describe the house: how many rooms and describe them. What markets they went to. Find out about the father’s trip: when he came home, how long was he home, did he go to any special places, and describe the trip from his village to Hong Kong. In describing the home, we had to get the details of the main things in it and how the family slept, what bedroom each occupied. Sometimes it would take three or four hours to examine each one.”

Immigration Inspector #2, 1929–1961



*The interrogation process*

“When it was my turn to be interrogated, they first made me wait in a small room. After a while, they called me in and started asking me this and that, this and that, until I had a headache. After three or four hours of this, they confined me to a downstairs room where I stayed overnight. The next day, they questioned me again. They very seldom question you one day and allow you to return upstairs. One strange question they asked me was: ‘What is your living room floor made of?’ I replied, ‘Brick.’ They said, ‘Okay. What is the floor under your bed made of?’ So I thought if the living room floor was brick, then the bedroom must also be of brick. So I said, ‘Brick!’ They typed the answer down and didn’t say anything. The next day, they asked the same question and I replied, ‘Brick’ again. They said my father had said it was dirt. What happened was that the floor was dirt at first, but later, after my father left for America, I changed the floor myself to brick. Where I really went wrong was in answering the question about who gave me the passage money. My father had written that he would send the money home to my mother to give me so that’s what I said. But what happened was my father didn’t really have the money and another relative loaned the money to my mother. So although I was a real son, I failed the interrogation. My deepest impression of Angel Island now was the rudeness of the white interrogators. They kept saying, ‘Come on, answer, answer.’ They kept rushing me to answer until I couldn’t remember the answers anymore. And it wasn’t just the whites. The Chinese interpreters did too.”

Mr. Leung, age 24 in 1936



“I was the only boy in the men’s dormitories. Nobody took care of me, so I soon became dirty and full of lice. After three months, I was called for interrogation. The inspector only asked me my father’s name; then I was landed. The interpreter told me I was lucky, because the sight of lice crawling all over me caused the inspector to cut short questioning and enable me to arrive in Chinatown in time to ‘eat chicken thigh’ on Chinese New Year’s Eve.”

Mr. Gin, age 6 in 1915

*Reprinted from Lai, Him Mark, Genny Lim and Judy Yung, Island: Poetry and History of Chinese Immigrants Detained on Angel Island, 1910–1940, San Francisco, CA: HOC DOI, 1980, pages 112–117.*

## The Later Years

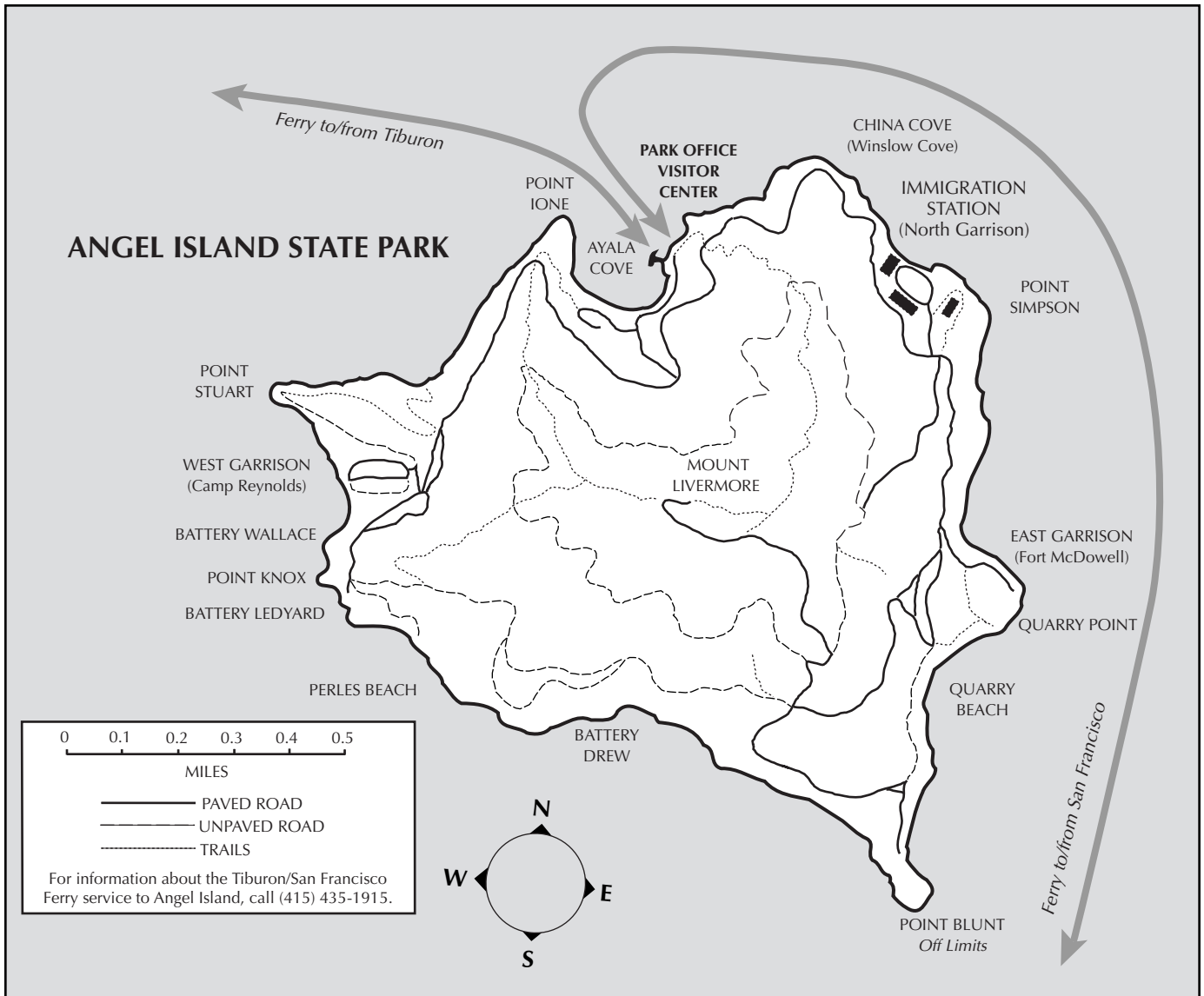
The station was closed in 1940 when a fire destroyed many of the buildings. The site was then turned over to the Army and became known as the North Garrison of Fort McDowell. Between 1941 and 1946 it served as a prisoner-of-war camp for military prisoners from Japan, Italy and Germany. When the island was decommissioned after the war, the barracks and other buildings were boarded up and left to decay. Scavengers stripped away all the metal fixtures, and the pier was removed to discourage further vandalism.

By 1962 most of Angel Island had become a state park. In 1970 a park ranger discovered the poems carved into the wooden barracks wall. This discovery galvanized the Asian American community, which launched a successful campaign to save the site from demolition. Now it has become an important focal point of Chinese American history. Although some who had been detained on Angel Island still feel embarrassed about this painful part of their past, others return in significant numbers to



*The 1940 fire destroyed many buildings on Angel Island.*

relive their experience and honor the hundreds of immigrants who courageously left their homes to try to create a new life in America.



*Map showing major sites on Angel Island.*



*Aerial view of Angel Island showing the Immigration Station, Marin County and the Golden Gate Bridge.*

## Building the Immigration Station

- 1903** The Commissioner of Immigration's first petition to Congress for funds to erect an immigration station on government lands in the San Francisco harbor. In addition to processing Chinese immigrants, it was intended to handle a flood of Europeans entering through the Panama Canal.
- 1905** Congressional appropriation of \$300,000 to start work on the immigration station. The Secretary of War approved the transfer of 10 acres at China Cove to the Department of Commerce and Labor (Bureau of Immigration).
- 1906** The San Francisco earthquake and fire caused work to be suspended on the immigration station. Records that verified citizenship were destroyed; thus many Chinese people then residing in California were able to claim they were citizens.
- 1907** Work on the immigration station was resumed.
- 1908** First tree planting at China Cove. Eucalyptus, Monterey pine and palm trees were not native to the island. The immigration station was completed in October, but it was not opened due to a lack of funds.
- 1909** (April) The immigration station reservation was enlarged by 4.2 acres. (October) United States Senator William Dillingham visited the station and was impressed with its fine facilities and slightly location. Funds for an early opening were promised. Concurrently, the still-unused immigration station was criticized as being too large and "many years in advance of requirements."

## Pre-World War I

- 1910** The immigration station was officially opened. The complex included a two-story administration building with interrogation rooms and offices, detention barracks, hospital, dormitories for staff, power house, laundry, wharf, storehouse, carpenter shop, water tanks, cottages and a ferry boat station. A fence enclosed a small recreation yard and the barracks. A guntower guarded federal prisoners kept on the second floor of the barracks. There

were immediate complaints of the station's inconvenient location and the lack of water, which made it unsanitary and a fire hazard.

- 1911** The immigration service ferry, the *Angel Island*, was launched at Alameda. Direct telephone service from San Francisco to the immigration station began.

The San Francisco Chinese Chamber of Commerce, the Six Companies and merchants called for an investigation of the treatment of Chinese immigrants in the detention barracks, the first of many regarding maltreatment and poor conditions. The San Francisco Downtown Association forwarded the request directly to President William Howard Taft.

- 1912** Deaconess Katharine Maurer, "the angel of Angel Island," was appointed by the Methodist Women's Home Missionary Society to do Chinese welfare work at the immigration station. She worked on the island until the station closed in 1940, teaching detainees English and providing the women with small amenities.

Tye Leung, a Chinese American who had been hired as an assistant to the matrons and an interpreter during the first year of the station's operation, married immigration inspector Charles Schulze. Racist attitudes forced her and her husband to resign their positions.



*Tye Leung*

## World War I

**1914** The outbreak of World War I lessened the anticipated need for the immigration station to process immigrants coming from Europe directly through the Panama Canal.

**1916** The Commissioner of Immigration recommended the expenditure of \$175,000 for improving sanitation and for fireproofing the detention house and hospital at the immigration station.

**1917** The San Francisco Chinese Chamber of Commerce requested that President Woodrow Wilson send a special investigating committee, entirely independent of immigration officials, to look into conditions at the Angel Island Immigration Station.

(April 5) The United States declared war on Germany. Following this, all enemy aliens were removed from German ships in Pacific ports and Honolulu and detained at the Angel Island Immigration Station.

**1918** The Commissioner of Immigration admitted that the Angel Island installation was a mistake. Immediate relocation was recommended but did not occur until 1940.

## Post-World War I

**1919** A food riot broke out among male detainees. Federal troops were called in to restore order.

**1920** More than 19,000 “picture brides,” mostly from Japan, had been processed through the station. Only “questionable” or unclaimed brides were detained.

(July) A congressional committee inspected the station but could not agree on the validity of local criticism. In August the Commissioner of Immigration cited poor conditions and high costs in recommending relocation.

(October) A three-month meningitis epidemic broke out, the result of overcrowding, poor sanitation and limited water, hospital and medical services.

**1921** The Secretary of Labor urged the removal of the immigration station to San Francisco. An increase in immigration (50 percent over 1920) stimulated the desire to relocate.

**1922** A special representative of the Department of Labor declared the facilities to be obsolete and disgraceful firetraps. He attributed the 1920 meningitis epidemic to station conditions.

Male detainees formed a self-governing association—*Zizhahui* or Angel Island Liberty Association—to provide mutual aid and a social structure. Officers were elected from among those who had been detained the longest.



*Japanese “picture brides”*

**1924** An even more restrictive immigration act was passed to exclude all aliens ineligible to be citizens. Considered to be “non-white” were Chinese, Japanese, Koreans, Hindus, Filipinos, Afghans, Arabs, Burmese and native peoples from Canada and South America. “White” were Mexicans, Armenians, Parsees and Syrians. All Chinese women were barred. Previously, wives of Chinese merchants and American-born Chinese were allowed to enter the United States, though wives of laborers were excluded.

**1925** Protests occurred over the housing of federal prisoners. The second floor of the immigration station served as a temporary federal penitentiary until Alcatraz was opened in 1934. The station was not equipped or staffed to deal with hardened criminals.

(February) The crew members of a rum-runner escaped from detention (and were recaptured).

**1931 to 1932** Two Chinese detainees, Smiley Jann and Tet Yee, copied most of the poems written or carved on the barracks of the men’s dormitories.

**1935** The first of several deportation hearings regarding Harry Bridges was held on Angel Island for purposes of security. Founder of the Longshoremen’s Union and a native of Australia, Bridges was charged with being a Communist and, therefore, an undesirable alien. He ultimately was acquitted and became an American citizen.

## World War II

- 1940 to 1941** The German liner *Columbus* was scuttled to prevent capture by the British. The 512-member crew was taken aboard American ships and, in the diplomatic confusion, sent to Angel Island as “distressed seamen” rather than immigrants, enemy aliens or prisoners. The German government paid nearly \$1,000 per day to support them.
- 1940** The administration building burned. This was the only important structure destroyed by fire in the island’s history. About 150 German seamen from the *Columbus* helped fight the fire. The building was destroyed, but the 32 aliens in the building escaped. The 223 Chinese then in detention were removed to other quarters and subsequently to the immigration dormitory on Silver Avenue in San Francisco. The Germans remained at the quarantine station in Ayala Cove and were later transferred to inland camps.
- 1941 to 1946** The site was returned to the Army and was designated as the North Garrison. During this period German, Japanese and Italian prisoners of war were held on Angel Island prior to being sent to permanent camps. The first Japanese prisoner was captured from a one-man submarine in Pearl Harbor. Japanese Buddhist prisoners of war were permitted to worship, but Shintoists were not allowed to practice their faith because of its similarity to emperor worship. All German prisoners were processed at the North Garrison Prisoner-of-War Camp, a total of 272 by the end of the war; none ever escaped. Italian soldier-prisoners were captured during the Africa campaign. When Italy surrendered, they were no longer considered prisoners and were provided with services on the island, especially in hospitals. Pay for members of the Italian Service Unit was 80 cents per hour.
- 1943** The Chinese Exclusion Act was repealed. An annual token immigration quota of 105 was assigned to China. Arriving Chinese were still detained to determine the validity of their papers. Not until the early 1950s were consular officials at ports of embarkation made responsible for processing emigrants.
- 1944** The detention center was moved to the Appraiser’s Building at 630 Sansome Street in San Francisco.

## Post-Military Period

- 1946** Fort McDowell was considered government surplus and decommissioned as a military base, and the North Garrison was closed.
- 1960s** Clemency was granted to “paper sons and daughters” during the Kennedy administration.
- 1962** Most of Angel Island became part of the California state park system.
- 1970** Park ranger Alexander Weiss recognized the significance of the former immigration station, especially of the poetry written on the barracks walls. The buildings were saved from demolition.
- The California legislature, under House Resolution 205, created the Angel Island Immigration Station Historical Advisory Committee (AIISHAC) for the sole purpose of making recommendations and taking appropriate actions to preserve the immigration barracks on Angel Island as an important chapter in Asian American history.
- 1974 to 1976** The state legislature allocated \$250,000 to preserve and restore the barracks. Work was undertaken by the office of the state architect.
- 1979** Members of the Chinese community and others founded the Immigration Station Foundation to help in the restoration.
- Victor “Trader Vic” Bergeron, internationally famous restaurateur and artist who has employed a great many Asians (some of whom underwent the Angel Island experience), conceived of and donated an eight-foot, 6,000-pound black granite monument dedicated to those who were detained at the Angel Island Immigration Station.
- (March) The EUREKA Foundation restored the immigration station service bell, which was discovered in a San Diego metal junkyard, to a permanent resting place back on Angel Island.
- 1982** The Exclusion Law Centennial Commemorative event was held on the island.
- 1983** The Immigration Station Museum opened.
- 1986** A naturalization ceremony was held on the site of the immigration station for 107 new American citizens.



# Student Background Essays

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The Americans All® student essays provide background information on Native Americans, African Americans, Asian Americans, European Americans, Mexican Americans and Puerto Rican Americans, as well as on Angel Island, Ellis Island and the Statue of Liberty. Adapted from the Americans All® resource texts, the student essays have been created to meet both

the language and social studies requirements of grades 3–4, 5–6 and 7–9. These essays are in blackline-master format and appear in their respective grade-specific teacher’s guides. Learning activities found in each teacher’s guide encourage the use of these student essays both in the classroom and at home.

# The Photograph Collection

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163. Aerial view of Angel Island in San Francisco Bay. Between 1910 and 1940, it served as a major port of entry for more than 1 million immigrants seeking admission to the United States. It was the Ellis Island of the West.
164. Typical transoceanic ship that carried immigrants across the Pacific Ocean to San Francisco Bay from China, Japan and other Asian countries.
165. Japanese immigrants on board ship awaiting inspection by Immigration Service officers who made health checks and examined papers. People who passed this shipboard inspection were free to go ashore in San Francisco.
166. Crowded deck of ship carrying immigrants being met by the Health Service boat maintained by the Immigration Service on Angel Island. Passengers were transported to the immigration station aboard ferries.
167. Many Japanese “picture brides” arrived between 1908 and 1920. They became the wives of Japanese men, who were prohibited by law in most states from marrying women of other races.
168. Aerial view of the immigration station complex opened in 1910. The main administration building is seen in the foreground; the barracks are located behind and to the right. The primary purpose of the complex was to enforce the Chinese Exclusion Acts.
169. A group of immigrants approaching the administration building from the pier. Japanese women are in front; Chinese men follow. Immigrants were not permitted to keep many belongings with them. Luggage was stored until a case was decided.
170. (top) A side view of the immigration station showing the dock and pier where ferries tied up. The ferries carried immigrants from their transoceanic ships to the island, and from the island to San Francisco. (bottom) The immigrants were housed in barracks while waiting to learn whether they could enter the United States. Women and young children were kept in the women’s dormitory; men were assigned to a separate dorm. The windows were covered with mesh screens.
171. The reception room in the administration building where the immigration process began. The administration building also had offices, interrogation rooms, a dining hall and rooms for other services.
172. Barbed-wire fences enclosed much of the area surrounding the barracks.
173. In the crowded dormitories, bunks were tiered three high and two across so that six people could sleep between two poles. The men’s dormitory (shown here) could accommodate 200 men; the women’s quarters held 70 to 100 women and children.
174. Chinese men playing a game of volleyball in the small exercise area by the barracks.
175. Chinese men and boys filing out of the barracks. They took these stairs three times each day to go to the dining hall and to get to the exercise yard.
176. Chinese cooks in the kitchen located in the administration building. They commuted to the island from San Francisco and prepared western foods at huge steam tables.
177. Immigrants eating at long tables in the dining hall. Western food was served. Food was a source of discontent to immigrants. A dining room riot erupted in 1919, resulting in federal troops being sent to the island. At other times, immigrants went on hunger strikes to bring attention to the poor quality of the food.
178. A long row of sinks and open showers in the men’s bathroom. Many washed themselves from bowls at their bunks rather than use the showers.
179. Young Chinese males standing on the hospital front stairs. All immigrants were given physical exams.
180. Men’s ward in the hospital. Medical examiners tried to detect carriers of communicable or infectious diseases. Immigrants with symptoms were kept in the hospital wards.
181. An immigration officer conducting a physical exam. The methods of examining the body were unfamiliar to the Chinese immigrants. They found them embarrassing and humiliating.
182. Chinese immigrants repack their recently disinfected luggage. Immigration officials used preventive measures to protect against infectious diseases. These included the fumigation of people and their belongings.
183. Children wait on Angel Island while the Immigration Service decides whether they have a legitimate claim to United States citizenship.

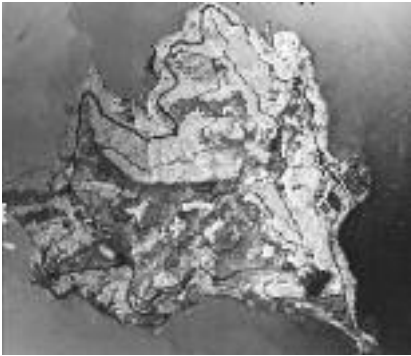
184. The immigration officials settled every claim to American citizenship based on an oral interrogation. This experience was formal and frightening. The immigrant was quizzed by a committee that usually included immigration officers, an interpreter and a stenographer.
185. A page from a coaching book. Immigrants used these books to prepare themselves for the many detailed questions that interrogators would ask. Correct answers meant the difference between entry into the United States and deportation.
186. This poem is one of hundreds carved into the wooden walls of the barracks. Each poem expressed the deep emotions felt by its author.
187. A Chinese preacher addressing a group of men and boys. Day-to-day life in detention was boring. Immigrants formed associations and found positive outlets for their energies.
188. Behind the barbed-wire and meshed fences, children, like this little Chinese girl with her dolls, played.
189. An immigrant boy of this age would be assigned to the women's quarters. Older boys were housed in the men's dorm.
190. Chinese American Tye Leung worked on Angel Island as an interpreter. When she married a non-Asian immigration inspector, Charles Schulze, the couple was forced to resign due to racial prejudice.
191. Methodist Deaconess Katharine Maurer, known as "the angel of Angel Island," with two Japanese immigrants in her office on Angel Island. She worked there as a social worker from 1912 until 1940, commuting each day from San Francisco.
192. Immigrants who have been cleared by the Immigration Service to enter the United States boarding a ferry bound for San Francisco. Most Chinese immigrants who were detained on Angel Island gained entry to the United States. The average stay on the island was two weeks, but many stayed longer. The longest known stay was 22 months.
193. Aerial view of the fire that destroyed a major portion of the administration building in 1940. The government then closed the station and moved its immigration offices to San Francisco. In 1962 the site became part of the California state park system. Members of the Chinese community organized to restore and preserve the artifacts of their past.
194. (top) Contemporary photo of the men's dormitory in the immigration barracks. Crowding was the rule, not the exception. (bottom) Restored bunks in the women's dormitory show how spartan life was.
195. The original foundation of the dining room is now the site of a 6,000-pound black granite monument dedicated in 1979 to all those immigrants who were detained at the immigration station.
196. Close-up of the monument. A translation of the Chinese inscription reads:

*Leaving their homes and villages, they  
crossed the ocean  
Only to endure confinement in these  
barracks;  
Conquering frontiers and barriers, they  
pioneered  
A new life by the Golden Gate.*

—Ngoot P. Chin

197. The large fog-warning bell that once sat at the end of the landing pier has been moved to the beach. The bell, cast in 1910, once announced the arrival of immigrants. Now it sits near the barracks as a reminder of the island's immigration experiences.

163



Aerial view of Angel Island

164



A transoceanic ship

165



Inspection on board ship

166



Checking papers on board ship

167



Japanese "picture brides"

168



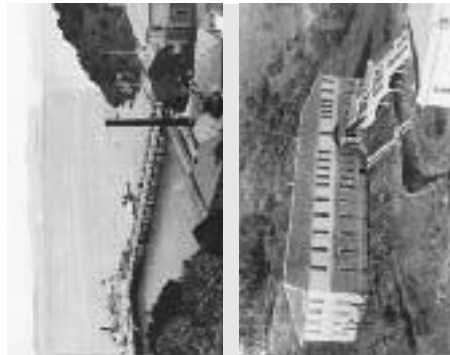
The Angel Island facility

169



Arriving immigrants

170



Docked ferries and barracks

171



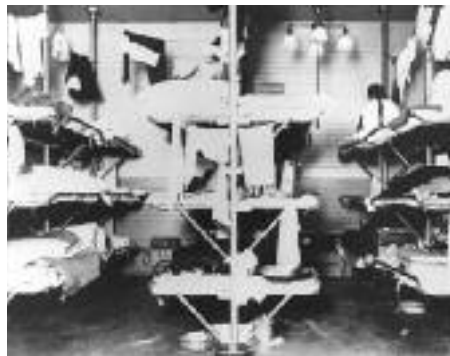
Reception room

172



Barbed-wire fence

173



Living quarters

174



Volleyball in the small yard

175



Filing out of the barracks

176



Cooks in the kitchen

177



Immigrants' dining room

178



Men's washroom

179



Stairs of the hospital

180



Inside the hospital ward

181



Medical examination

182



Repacking fumigated luggage

183



Children on the island

184



The interrogation board

185



Page from a coaching book

186



Poem on a barracks wall

187



Preacher addressing men

188



Young immigrant girl

189



Young immigrant boy

190



Tye Leung

191



Deaconess Katharine Maurer

192



Immigrants leaving the island

193



The 1940 fire

194



Men's and women's dormitories, 1990

195



Dining hall site

196



Close-up of monument

197



Fog-warning bell

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