

# PASSAGES

## AIISF AT STATE SESQUICENTENNIAL

On September 6, AIISF staff traveled to Sacramento to take part in the California Admission Day 2000 Festival, the state sesquicentennial celebration at the capitol. In addition three actors, headed by Mitzie Abe, captured the attention and imagination of the many visiting student groups with riveting portrayals of two Chinese immigrants and a Japanese picture bride passing through Angel Island. AIISF was part of the "Living History Timeline" that circled the Capitol Building on the mall – beginning with the Native Californian tribes and early pioneer settlers, continuing through the Gold Rush, into the 20th century and on to the present.



Actors Peter Wong, Mitzie Abe and Ching Chi Yu at the California Admission Day 2000 Festival in Sacramento.

That same day AIISF Board President Felicia Lowe went to the Colfax Founder's Day event which featured cultural and historical presentations, as well as contributions made by settlers in the gold country.



On November 8, *Saving America's Treasures*, a new book from Save America's Treasures and National Geographic, went on sale. The book, which includes a feature on the Immigration Station, sells for \$35 and is available from major booksellers. Copies of the book will also be available through Angel Island Association. Proceeds will benefit the docent tour program.

## AIISF BEGINS EDUCATION INITIATIVE

Last year more than 46,000 people, the majority of them schoolchildren, visited Angel Island Immigration Station, making it one of the most visited historic places by California's students. In recognition of the important role the Immigration Station plays, AIISF is embarking upon an ambitious \$250,000 educational planning and development phase to bring the significance and messages of Angel Island Immigration Station to audiences on and off the island. The Marin Community Foundation (MCF) is partnering with AIISF in this effort, providing \$125,000 in matching grant funds over the next 18 months.

At first glance, the musty barracks hardly seem the idyllic place for a class field trip. But the poetry carved on the barracks walls teaches valuable lessons. Between 1910 and 1940, approximately 200,000 Chinese immigrants were imprisoned at the Angel Island Immigration Station. Under locked detention, they carved poems into the wooden barracks walls, wondering why they suffered such humiliating imprisonment in a nation known throughout the world as a place of freedom and hope. The dozens of poems, carved in classical Chinese form, are a unique historical record, telling of the anger, despair, and hope that immigrants brought with them.

To this day, the Chinese Exclusion Act remains the only legislation ever to ban a specific ethnic group from entry into the United States. Yet an informal survey of U.S. history books currently in classroom use shows a one-sentence mention of Chinese Exclusion, no mention of Angel Island and no mention of U.S. naturalization laws that prohibited Asian immigrants from becoming citizens until the mid-20th century.

While the specifics of the Angel Island story are about the Chinese, the lessons are universal.



AIA Docent Fred Shephard leads students on a tour of the Immigration Station.

The story of Angel Island immigration is a quintessentially American story – one of hope, challenge and ultimately, of triumph. The range of immigrants who passed through the Immigration Station extends from countries around the world.

Although painful to recall, the many lessons of Chinese exclusion, Japanese internment, the Trail of Tears, Jim Crow laws – all are part of our collective history, a history which challenges our ideals and values as a nation. "A complete history provides us with a common memory of where we have been in order to understand better where we are going," says AIISF Executive Director Katherine Toy. "What are our nation's core values? Have they changed over time? How do decisions of the past account for present circumstances? These are the questions we need

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### Angel Island Immigration

**Station Foundation** is a non-profit organization whose primary goals are:

- to lead the effort to preserve, restore and interpret Angel Island Immigration Station, a National Historic Landmark, as the Pacific gateway for U.S. immigration; and
- to promote educational activities that further the understanding of Pacific Rim immigration in American history.

## President's Message

Dear Friends,

Excitement is running high because as you read this, the conditions assessment of the Immigration Station site has begun. Starting with the poems on the barracks walls, restoration experts will be deciding how best to preserve the carvings and the written poems, some hidden under layers of paint. Wouldn't it be wonderful if they uncover and discover new ones? These baseline studies will take nine months to complete. Armed with the newfound information, the planning process will continue.

While the site work is underway, AIISF will also turn its sights to the future educational programming on and off the island. This involves identifying and researching models across the country, and bringing together innovators and community members for visioning workshops.

The Foundation continues to grow with the welcome addition of four new board members: Forrest Gok, public relations and development director of Asian Health Services; Architect Tod Hara of Moore, Iacofano, Goltsman; Phillip Hofstetter, director of Multimedia Studies and assistant professor of Electronic Arts at California State University, Hayward; and Consultant Kathy Lim Ko. Most of you know Kathy has played an integral role in AIISF's development in the past three years and we're thrilled to have her join the board.

Our "Cause for Celebration" fundraiser was a big success thanks to the generosity of corporate donors: AAA – California State Automobile Association, Bank of America, Thomas and Eva Fong Foundation, KGO-TV ABC 7, and Pacific Gas and Electric Company; those who contributed items and experiences for our silent auction; and all of you who joined us in the celebration. The evening's proceeds support our staff and infrastructure.

As this will be our last newsletter of the year, let me wish you the best of the holiday season. It is your generosity that keeps us going and should you want to make a tax-deductible donation before the end of the year, please keep AIISF in mind.

Warm regards,



Felicia Lowe  
President of the Board

## In The News

### News from the Angel Island Association

Surrey Blackburn, Executive Director of Angel Island Association

The Immigration Station now has two new Site Captains: Clyde Taylor, a former board member, and Michelle Burrill. Both have been docents at the site for at least three years and were glad to agree to shoulder the duties of Site Captain. Ellen Loring performs the unenviable task of not only scheduling tours at the site, but also finding the docents to lead the tours. Last year over two thousand tours were scheduled and given, thanks to Ellen's organizational skills. Indeed if a docent was sick or one was unable to be found, Ellen led the tour. This school year she has trained her teachers to book early to ensure that their students are on the tour schedule. Presently we are booked with school tours through November, most of March, all of April and May, and most of June. Teachers are now booking in December, January and February with the hope that it will not rain on the day they have chosen. Students come from as far as Reno, Bakersfield and Eureka, and in several instances the teachers have booked their students to camp overnight on the island, so they then can have an early morning tour before the ferries arrive and still have the date they want. Increased interest in the Immigration Station has tripled attendance at the site over the last four years. AIA is struggling to ensure that everyone who comes is given a tour.

#### Angel Island Association Figures from Sept. 1999–Oct. 2000:

Number of docents who led tours of the Immigration Station:	35
Number of Immigration Station tours:	2,429
Number of docent volunteer hours for the Immigration Station:	17,749
Number of people/students given docent led tours of Immigration Station:	46,027

### Park Update

Nick Franco, Angel Island State Park Superintendent

Two new positions for Angel Island State Park were approved to help guide the restoration of the Immigration Station. The positions are a Senior Architect and a State Park Interpreter II. The architect may be changed to another closely related technical position, depending upon the preliminary work being done, to define better the scope of the restoration project. In any case, that position will primarily be responsible for the contracting and technical aspects of the details involved in restoring the site. They will work closely with State Parks resource staff in Sacramento, the National Park Service staff, AIISF and site consultant Dan Quan to ensure that the work being done matches the vision we've all already outlined.

The interpreter position will likely be filled by January 1st. I will be receiving the applications from those interested within the next two weeks and expect to interview the applicants in the middle of November. This person will be responsible for developing the interpretive plans, furnishing plans, teacher's guides and other documents that help people understand the significance of the site. I expect that this person will be working significantly with AIISF to develop these items and to coordinate special events and tours. I have had a number of phone calls from interested people who have years of experience in interpretive planning and whom I know would do an excellent job. I'm looking forward to bringing a person on board quickly.

As soon as I can, I will be hiring a seasonal interpreter to assist with the staffing of the Immigration Station. We are experiencing a large increase in visitation, especially by schools, and we don't have adequate volunteer coverage to keep it open all the time. I'm still working on how this will be funded, but I'm committed to keeping the site open as much as possible.

### New Faces on Board

AIISF is proud to welcome four new board members this fall:

**Forrest Gok** has worked in public relations and development for community-based non-profit organizations for the past 19 years. He has been the public relations and development director at Asian Health Services for the past five years. Prior to that, he was the executive director of the Asian Business League of San Francisco from 1995–1996 and the public relations director of Self-Help for the Elderly from 1986–1995. He is currently on the board of the Cal Alumni Association-Chinese Chapter and served on the board of the Volunteer Center of San Francisco from 1995–1999. He is a graduate of the University of California Berkeley.

**Tod Hara** is a landscape architect with over 25 years of experience in master planning, urban and landscape design, and project management. Currently employed at Moore, Iacofano, Goltsman, Inc., Tod has served as project manager and designer on innovative projects throughout the United States, with emphasis in the planning and design of environments for children. He was part of the facilitation team during the 1999 visioning workshops for the Angel Island Immigration Station museum concept.

**Phillip Hofstetter** is director of Multimedia Studies and assistant professor of Electronic Arts at California State University, Hayward. Phil brings experience and innovation in the use of cutting-edge technology to educate students and the general public about historic sites. Since 1991 he has served as media director of the Yaxuna archaeological excavations in the Yucatan.

**Kathy Lim Ko** served as a consultant to AIISF for nearly three years. In that capacity, Kathy has helped position the organization in its work with the National Park Service, California Department

of Parks and Recreation, and the National Trust, as well as secure funds for AIISF's operating budget. Kathy also helped AIISF with strategic planning and program and organizational development, as she has with other community-based organizations and foundations in San Francisco and Oakland. Kathy's other consulting work also consists of capital development and financing plans for non-profits, as well as project planning for a number of health care organizations.

*Education, continued from page 1*

to ask. Using the story of Angel Island immigration, we can explore the tension between American ideals and reality," explains Toy.

Marin Community Foundation's generous grant enables AIISF to "think big" in planning for the future. The September grant totaled \$150,000–\$125,000 for education and \$25,000 for site restoration. "This is a unique regional resource that we are proud to help make more meaningful and accessible to local students and their families," says MCF President Thomas Peters. "By learning about the immigrant experience in such a compelling way, they can more fully appreciate what it means to struggle to reach this land and ultimately become a citizen."

AIISF will spend the next 18 months working with the Angel Island Association (AIA), California Department of Parks and Recreation (CDPR) and other local and national partners to develop educational outreach and programming. Programming will be designed to compliment tours of the Immigration Station given by AIA docents and to reach out to those who may never have the opportunity to visit the island. The goal is to use the most cutting-edge technology to partner with other institutions nationwide which share AIISF's mission of addressing important questions of exclusion, inclusion, citizenship, and cultural diversity. "We're really excited about some of the preliminary ideas we have – they include a virtual museum, distance-learning and on-line materials for teachers and students," says Toy.

*A Child's Eye View, continued from page 5*

Why I was treated so harshly was because of that law. When I found out about it, I was disgusted, I was hurt... And for me it was relatively easy because I was legitimate. My grandfather lived here on Vallejo Street. And my father was in business in San Jose. So I stayed only a short time – about five weeks.

**During the time that you were there did anyone visit you?**

No, no visitors allowed.

**I would think that would be very difficult as a young boy.**

It was. But I had playmates there. I wasn't scared. And these people in the kitchen would bring letters to me from my father and sometimes I'd write letters to him.

**So you did have some contact with the outside world.**

With my father yes... I didn't see him until five weeks had passed and my case was OK and they said "you're legitimate" and they let me out. Then my father came to pick me up. Three years later my mother and my two brothers came. And I grew up in San Jose.

**Did you ever feel bitter about the experience you had at Angel Island?**

Not at the time. But now I look back – it's uncalled for... these people [immigrants], they are not criminals. Why should they be locked up behind bars?

But now that I look back it was very discriminating, very harsh treatment. Because we were locked behind bars like criminals. I was in the Air Force for five years and you know we [the U.S.] would do that with the P.O.W.s. They [officials] looked down at you – the questioner, the guards. Not at all friendly. They thought they were in a class themselves – they treated us like Class C humans. I didn't feel that way when I was there. I feel that way now.

**Why was it decided to come to America at the age that you did?** To get a better education. To get a better living. That's mainly why everyone came to America. For the opportunity.



Albert Wong today.

### PASSAGES

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### Grants

This past quarter, AIISF received generous support from: Thomas and Eva Fong Foundation; The Wallace Alexander Gerbode Foundation; Marin Community Foundation; and the U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service.

You may also support the work of AIISF by contributing through your employer's United Way campaign. Although AIISF has no numerical code in this year's campaign, you may write our name and address: Angel Island Immigration Station Foundation P.O. Box 29237, San Francisco, CA 94129-0237 in the designated space on your United Way donation form.

## "Cause for Celebration"

*as of 11/14/00*

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# A Child's Eye View of Angel Island Immigration Station

Interview by Adam Wimbush

*This past summer I had the good fortune to talk with Albert Wong, a former Angel Island detainee, who came to America at a young age and was held at the Immigration Station. I caught up with him in Chinatown where Albert was launching a steady stream of jumpers on the basketball court. He took time out to talk to me about his Angel Island experience, sixty-six years ago, as a twelve-year-old boy.*

I came from Hong Kong in 1934. It took 21 days and I came on the American President Line, the Hoover... I left my brother and mother at home. They were crying when I left, naturally, and I didn't know until later why I was the one going, because I was the oldest boy in the family.



*Albert Wong, age 12, with his younger brother just before leaving Hong Kong for the United States.*

### **How old were you when you left?**

I was 12 and that was 1934 and I remember exactly because my mother was pregnant and in 1935 my kid brother was born a few months after I came over. I stayed at Angel Island and I remember we went there by ferry from the Hoover directly to the island. And there were bushes – it was like wild country and I remember the wooden plank walk, very long. We landed went to the left and up the hill a little bit and then came to a building. That was the Administration Building I guess. We were all separated into small groups. As a kid I didn't realize what was going on. We were all stripped and examined – for what I do not know.

Then we were assigned to this one big barrack... there was a long walk up to the barrack. I remember walking up the stairway and to the right there was another community and I was told later they were Japanese... My barrack was exclusively Chinese. There were metal gates separating us from the guard directly outside the barracks. I remember he had guns and rifles in that office. My only outside contact was with the interrogator and the interpreter.

There were benches and each one of us was assigned a bed, a bunk. I remember mine was at the end – at the end of the building was an opening going out to a volleyball court and my bed was three bunks above that end... I liked it because I could get to the court quickly. When the grown-ups were not playing basketball, us kids would play our games, see. There were no other playgrounds.

It was very rigid. Early in the morning, line up, go and have breakfast, do the same thing at noon for lunch, do the same thing at supper-time. I don't remember what the food was like, it couldn't have been too good because my father knew some of the people in the kitchen that worked there and I would always get extra stuff that my father sent over.

As a kid I didn't think much of it but now when I look back it was very depressing. There were people there very old in their sixties and some of them I talked to had been there for years waiting for their case to come up... I had never witnessed any myself but I was told there had been three suicides and it always happened in the bathroom [Editor's note: while it has been rumored, no case of suicide at the Immigration Station has ever been documented]. As a kid I was scared to go to the bathroom at night so I would wake up somebody to go with me.

### **Did you ever see anyone carving a poem into the wall?**

No – not in the time I was there... I remember a lot of writing on the walls. I was a kid and didn't think much of it; I thought it was graffiti. It was from way back and I'm sure some of it is still there... I was only there about five weeks. I was interrogated several times.

### **What was that like?**

Well as a kid I didn't mind. A lot of people had to study. They had come in fictitiously and they had to learn what questions and answers were



*Albert Wong with his father in San Jose, shortly after being released from the Immigration Station.*

correct or not. People around me were worried all the time. But for me it was natural. They asked about your family, they asked about your house, this and that. So I just told them what I know. They asked a lot of stupid questions... unrelated things about which you couldn't possibly have an answer. Such as "what's your third sister's boyfriend's name?" Where did they get the answers? I don't know... They were not interrogating to help you, they were interrogating with the purpose of doing you damage. That's how I feel.

I remember one time: at my house in the village, we had an orchard with lots of fruit. And one time the interrogators asked me "how many steps are there going down there?" And I didn't know, I didn't count it. And they said, "You mean you went up and down there every day and you don't remember?" "I don't remember." I said, "You go up and down the stairs here every day – you tell me how many steps there are." And they laughed – they cracked up laughing.

### **Were most of the people who came illegitimate "paper sons"?**

Most were illegitimate. I didn't know about the Chinese Exclusion Laws until I went to school.

*continued on page 3*

*AIISF is a non-profit organization fully qualified under 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code. All contributions (including Friends payments) are tax deductible to the maximum extent permitted by law. For those wishing to make larger gifts or contributions, please contact AIISF for more information.*

## Commemorative T-Shirt

Proceeds from the sale of the commemorative t-shirt honoring Angel Island Immigration Station as a National Historic Landmark will go toward the docent training program for the Immigration Station. Please contact the Angel Island Association at (415) 435-3522 for more information.



*Wear a landmark! Specially designed for the Landmark event, these t-shirts are silkscreened in four colors and are 100% cotton. Available in adult sizes S, M, L, XL for \$12.00 and XXL for \$14.00 (plus sales tax and shipping).*

Would you like to plan a special visit to the Immigration Station? Please call AIA Volunteer Co-ordinator Ellen Loring at (415) 435-3522 and she will be happy to make the arrangements for your group.



Angel Island Immigration Station Foundation  
P.O. Box 29237  
San Francisco, CA 94129-0237

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