Volume 5 No. 1 THE QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER OF THE ANGEL ISLAND IMMIGRATION STATION FOUNDATION Fall 2001

PASSAGES

SITE UPDATE: ARG AND OLMSTED MAKE NEW DISCOVERIES

Over the past several months, teams of historians, conservators, architects and hazardous materials specialists from the architectural firm Architectural Resources Group (ARG) have been hard at work conducting research and assessments at the Immigration Station site in preparation for making preservation treatments for the buildings. We thought we'd share with you a few of the discoveries regarding the poetry on the walls of the detention barracks:

- The carvings are in good condition except where wood rot and water infiltration have attacked the walls.
- Analysis of paint samples revealed 7-8 layers of painting campaigns.
- The precious carvings are filled with putty or paste, and the original carvings are much crisper than previously thought.
- Many of the more detailed poems were first inked by brush, the outline of the characters carved and then hollowed out, and finally the deep flat surface of the character inked again for greater visibility.
- Removing individual layers of paint are possible, but would be time-consuming, painstaking and probably cost prohibitive. Other methods of making the poetry more visible are being explored.
- There are more inscriptions on the walls than there are translations currently. Further research, translation, and interpretation will need to be done, primarily on the second floor of the barracks.
- Carvings of images, such as birds and houses, were also found alongside the poetry.

In addition to the work being conducted by ARG, The Olmstead Center for Landscape Preservation has completed their research in preparation for making recommendations for the preservation of the Immigration Station grounds. Interviews with former detainees and residents of the Immigration Station were conducted and information was gathered at archives locally and nationally regarding the use of the site and the changes that occurred over time.

- A Hookooeko Tribe of the Coast Miwok group settlement existed near the Immigration Station site from 1000 AD until the late 1800s. They used the land both as a temporary settlement and a hunting/gathering site.
- The 1906 San Francisco earthquake and fire changed building priorities and made construction materials more expensive in the Bay Area, delaying the Immigration Station construction and making it more costly.
- Problems regarding the steep terrain, drainage and the need for a fresh water supply plagued the building process throughout.
- When immigrants arrived at the immigration station they found a very formal landscape, signifying the authoritative presence of a large government structure. Away from the entrance toward the back of the site, the landscaping became less formal as indicated by a strolling garden.
- Private spaces were at a premium and only existed adjacent to and behind the employee cottages. At one point, a dispute over the boundary between the immigration station and the Army caused the latter to bulldoze the backyards of the employee cottages.

Angel Island Immigration Station Foundation is a non-profit organization whose primary goals are:

a) 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

b) to promote educational activities that further the understanding of Pacific Rim immigration in American history.

AIISF CELEBRATES 25TH ANNIVERSARY

SUSAN LOUIE

(l to r) Julia Ling (ED of Chinese Newcomers Service Center) with AIISF board members Patty Dingle, Irene Yee Riley (event co-chair) and Ginny Yamate

On October 4, AIISF celebrated its 25th Anniversary with a gala event at the Palace Hotel in downtown San Francisco. The event was co-chaired by AIISF board member Irene Yee Riley and former San Francisco Supervisor, Mabel Teng, with KGO-TV reporter Kristen Sze as emcee. AIISF honored Flo Oy Wong, for her art exhibition about the secret stories of Angel Island Immigration Station detainees, and Lydia Lum, for her work gathering interviews with former detainees. Also honored were seventeen former detainees and two children of Immigration Station employees.

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SUSAN LOUIE

Event co-chair Mabel Teng

President's Message

Condemned to Repeat the Past?

Dear Friends:

All of us have been so deeply affected by the events of September 11. We were shocked and saddened by the tragic loss of life and sense of security. For us at AIISF, the aftermath has also become a fresh reminder of the individual stories and heartbreaks recorded and housed at the Angel Island Immigration Station. When the Attorney General announced that the Immigration and Naturalization Services (INS) would lengthen immigrant detentions without cause or process, we were all too painfully reminded of the parallels between our history at Angel Island and present-day immigration policy.

The contemporary issue of civil liberties of Americans and those who seek to become Americans is an important one for us at AIISF. Not only do we seek to preserve the literal history of racially-targeted exclusion, we also see our role to teach lessons to prevent us – the collective us – from repeating these mistakes again.

Since September, detentions of Arab and South Asian immigrants without process have posed sharp comparisons to Chinese exclusion and detention at Angel Island. Part of our work is to link the historical story of Angel Island Immigration Station to contemporary challenges to the civil liberties of American residents and citizens that somehow are perceived as the enemy. As part of our collective history, let us not be condemned to repeat a past which included other forms of forced detention, such as Japanese American internment.

Although we at AIISF have accomplishments to celebrate these days, with so much preservation activity going on at the Immigration Station, our hearts and souls are sobered by how quickly the past has come to haunt us. In a matter of hours on a bright and clear day in September, the past rushed up to meet us and our lessons became so much more important.

Condemnation is such a harsh concept. Let us reach out and learn from the past, so that all of our consciences – individually and collectively – can be free from it.

In peace,
Kathy Lim Ko

In the News

Gateway Exhibit Continues East Coast Tour

AIISF's "Gateway to Gold Mountain" Exhibit will finish its three month run at the National Endowment for the Arts and National Endowment for the Humanities in early December. It will then travel to New York to the Museum of Chinese in the Americas (MoCA) where it will open December 12 and stay until May of 2002. MoCA is located at 70 Mulberry Street in New York City's Chinatown. AIISF hopes to bring "Gateway" to Chicago and Los Angeles later next year. It will then return to New York for a special exhibition at Ellis Island in late 2002 or early 2003.

United Way Donations

For anyone giving to the United Way, if you would like to designate your donation to the Angel Island Immigration Station Foundation our United Way code number is 101945. Our code number is also listed in the United Way Community Giving Guide.

AIISF Job Opening

AIISF is currently accepting applications for a newly created Director of Education position. For more information and a complete job description, please email info@aiisf.org.

Anniversary, continued from page 1

SUSAN LOUIE

Former detainees Lucille Chan (foreground), Malin Tom and David Leong (background l to r)

SUSAN LOUIE

Former detainee Stanley Gee with wife Amy

SUSAN LOUIE

Honoree Lydia Lum with emcee Kristen Sze

SUSAN LOUIE

(l to r) Former detainee Lai Wah Webster with sisters Nellie Wong, and honoree, Flo Oy Wong

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AIISF has made every effort to include everyone involved with the event on this list. If we inadvertently missed a name, please let us know and we'll ensure that it appears in the next edition of Passages.

Oral History, continued from page 5

James Louie

James – 1932

James Louie was born in Canton, China in 1921. He was an adopted child and later came to the United States as a paper son. When he was 11 years old, his grandfather, already living in Pittsburgh, arranged for him to come to the United States for a better future.

Did you have to prepare as a paper son?
My paper father was my uncle who was already in America. And he himself came to this country as a paper son. He fabricated a village, and fabricated all the family names in the village. This was typical of all the paper sons that would come. Because in reality these people that came before me, a good number of them were paper sons to begin with. Actually I'm a Tom – see my paper name is Louie. I remember a schoolteacher would coach me in the village.

In 1932, James took the President Coolidge steamship from Hong Kong to San Francisco. He made the 21-day voyage with his uncle, his paper father, and his cousin, his paper brother. When they arrived, his uncle and cousin, who had been in the U.S. before, were allowed on the mainland while James was sent to Angel Island for what would become a 51-day stay.

What happened when you first arrived at Angel Island?
When I got off the boat we got on a little tug. I wasn't especially scared, but I was curious. When the tug arrived at the pier on Angel Island all of us had to leave our suitcases in a warehouse right at the dock. We just took a few essential things to the barrack where we stayed. Once a week, we were allowed to go down to the pier and get whatever we wanted from our luggage.

At the time I was there Mexico had an anti-Chinese campaign because they also had an economic depression. Two times there was a wave of Chinese *(from Mexico)* that came and stayed in the next barrack. There were Mexican women that were married to Chinese too. The Chinese group made representation to the American authorities, complaining of the conditions, the way they were being treated at Angel Island. The American response was that this was a humanitarian act *(allowing the Chinese to stay at Angel Island on their way back to China)* and the condition was not so bad.

Did any of the Chinese people who came from China also complain about the conditions?
The Chinese always complained – you could see by all the poems written on the wall. The conditions were not good but actually I didn't think that it was that bad. Of course I was just a kid.

What were the days generally like there?
There were three meals (a day). I think the food was somewhat good. It was simple but much better than what we had back in the village.

There was a gentleman who got detained at Angel Island for months and months and he knew English. And he taught English to whoever wanted to get in a class. So I had English classes.

We got to play outside. We would catch pigeons – there were so many of them. Somehow we got hot water, to pluck the feathers and so on, and we would take it to the cooks and they would cook it for us.

How often were you interrogated?
It was three different times. It was quite lengthy.

What kind of questions did they ask you?
All kinds of questions. About your village, your grandmother, how many windows do you have? They also always questioned the father and always questioned a witness. In this case my paper brother was the witness. Whatever was not written down before, whatever was not pre-arranged, the answers you gave couldn't be the same among all three of you.

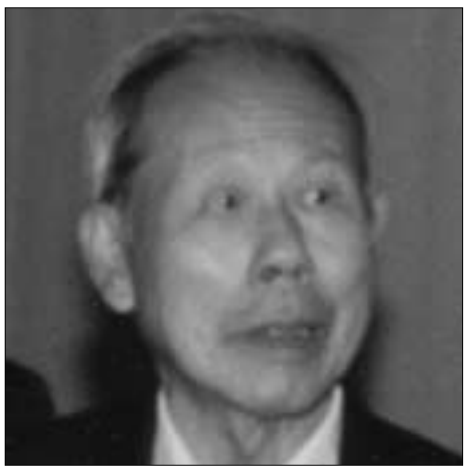
Did your answers match up?
We did not match up. They were going to deport me. What we did was appeal to the court. In my case, the "father" appealed. I understand it cost him $100; he had to bribe the immigration through a Chinese go-between, like so many others. Bribery in immigration played a major role. Finally as the paper says (I was) "admitted as son as son of native, parole evidence." That means that at anytime if they discover something wrong, or something you violate, they can bring you back.

Was the experience justifiable?
That's a complicated question. Why are the Chinese, why is anybody prevented from coming to the United States? If you say this is the (American) Indian's country, what right does the U.S. government have?

If you make those laws, laws are made to be broken. Laws are made because you have the power…not every law is justifiable. Why were the Chinese prevented from coming to this country in the first place? It's the strong against the weak. The wealthy puts down the poor.

After he left he went and stayed briefly in an import/export store at 815 Grand Avenue. He then took the train to Pittsburgh where his grandfather lived. Times were so hard, his grandfather had to hock his precious gold coin to get the train fare for James and his uncle and cousin. After going to school in Pittsburgh, James served in the Armed Forces and worked for Standard Oil in China.

What are the important lessons of Angel Island?
I think the most important thing is that we look at the other people and look at them as human beings. They should be equal. Back in high school *(in Pittsburgh)* there was a group of kids who were my life long friends. They treated me very much *(as an)* equal. They treated me as a human being. They didn't look down on me and they never despised me. We were friends. Some of them are still my friends. I guess I just happened to be in a town that was that way. Not all the towns were.



SUSAN LOUIE

James – 2001

Oral History: Two Tales of Angel Island

The life stories of Homer Lee and James Louie share a starting point (Canton, China) and an end (the Bay Area). In between these points, they both passed through the Angel Island Immigration Station. Homer's father lived and worked in the U.S.; James came as a paper son. Both men were honorees at AIISF's recent 25th Anniversary Event. Here, as part of AIISF's ongoing oral history project, Homer and James share their thoughts and experiences before, during and after their stay at Angel Island. If you or anyone you know has a story you would like to share about the Immigration Station, contact us at (415) 561-2160 or info@aiisf.org.

Homer Lee

SUSAN LOUIE

Homer – 2001

Homer Lee was born in Canton, China in 1910. His father worked in Alameda as a family cook. Homer came to the United States at the age of 16, taking a Dollar Steamship from Hong Kong to San Francisco in 1926. After the 24-day voyage, he was taken to Angel Island where he stayed from November 1926 until he was released in April 1927.

Why were you on Angel Island for so long?
Because some things my father and I said were not the same.

How many times did they talk to you?
Two or three times.

Did you feel sad or angry about having to wait so long?
No. We were just patient and waited until your name got called and you knew everything would be ok and you could come into the United States.

In the six months while you were there, what did you do everyday?
We enjoyed playing volleyball and some games. Made friends.

I remember one church group from San Francisco came and had a Christmas Party. That was very good. They came in with candy and popcorn. We very much enjoyed the Christmas party they gave to us.

The people who stayed a long time, they kept on hoping to get into the United States. Some people were angry. But you couldn't do anything about it.

Did you have any contact with your father?
Once in a while I asked my father to bring me butter. I liked to eat butter with bread.

How was this done?
They would put a note through the cook in the kitchen. They put a note in a thermos bottle. Then it went in to us.

We had a club in there *(the Angel Island Liberty Association)*. We had a president, secretary, and treasurer, just like a club. The president was elected by the detainees. He would conduct the meeting and tell the new people when they arrived what to do. Every year they chose a new president.

Why did they decide finally to let you in?
They got the ok in Washington, DC. We had a lawyer representing every one of us. They called out my number and name and said "you can go." San Francisco. April 17.

Where did you go when you left the island?
I was in San Francisco for about a week. Our village had a little room. In those old days, for people from our town who came in, we had a little room, a clubhouse, for people to stay. I stayed there for about a week and then went over to Alameda where my father worked.

After spending one year in Alameda with his father, Homer worked and went to school in Yosemite and then Berkeley through high school. During World War II, he was offered a chance to run a flower shop for a Japanese family who was sent to the internment camps.

When they returned after the war, he gave it back to them and opened his own flower shop in 1946 on University Avenue in Berkeley. It is still open today.

Do you feel like the Chinese people who came here were treated unfairly?
In the old days the Italians were against the Chinese. You could not go in certain districts. They wouldn't allow us to go up to Powell or Stockton Street.

That's why we formed the Chinese-American Citizen's Alliance *(Homer was President of the Oakland Chapter 1979-81, 83)*. We'd fight the immigration office and fight for the rights of the Chinese organizations. In 1924, they fought to bring Chinese women into the United States. Before then you couldn't bring them unless you were a merchant.

Have you ever been back to visit Angel Island?
I went a couple of times. It's changed a lot. I'm glad I'm out of there.

continued on page 4

SUSAN LOUIE

Homer and the Lee family

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 $15.00 and XXL for $17.00 (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.

Become a Friend

Become a "Friend" and receive quarterly issues of our newsletter and/or exclusively designed items that show your support of Angel Island Immigration Station and its rich historical legacy.

Student or Teacher Friend – $25
- Receive the quarterly newsletter for one year (Please enclose a current copy of your student or teacher I.D.)

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- Receive the quarterly newsletter for one year

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- Commemorative t-shirt
- A choice (please indicate) between the book, ISLAND by Him Mark Lai, Genny Lim and Judy Yung ***OR*** the video "Carved in Silence" by Felicia Lowe

Landmark Friend – $500
- Receive the quarterly newsletter for one year
- Commemorative t-shirt
- The book, ISLAND by Him Mark Lai, Genny Lim and Judy Yung ***AND*** the video "Carved in Silence" by Felicia Lowe

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