

PASSAGES

IMMIGRATION STATION BILL PASSES IN U.S. HOUSE

Immigration Station Bill Passes in U.S. House
On May 23 the U.S. House of Representatives unanimously approved the Angel Island Immigration Station Restoration and Preservation Act (H.R.606), which would authorize the use of federal funds for the Angel Island Immigration Station restoration project. The Angel Island bill is sponsored by Rep. Lynn Woolsey, D-Petaluma, House Democratic Leader Nancy Pelosi (D-San Francisco), and House Resources Committee member Representative Mark Souder (Ind.) and 33 other cosponsors. Sen. Dianne Feinstein, D-Calif., introduced an identical bill in the U.S. Senate (S. 359) which is still awaiting passage. Senators Barbara Boxer (D-Calif.), Daniel Akaka (D-Hawaii), and Daniel Inouye (D-Hawaii) are co-sponsors of the legislation in the Senate.

Under Woolsey's leadership, the bill passed the U.S. House of Representatives in the previous session of Congress, but was not taken up in the U.S. Senate before the session adjourned. "Starting-off the 109th Congress with identical bills in both chambers of Congress provided the momentum necessary for passage of the 'Angel Island Immigration Station Preservation and Restoration Act' in the U.S. House of Representatives, said Rep. Woolsey. "The U.S. Senate has already conducted hearings on the bill, and now we look to them to pass this legislation that is vital to the project's completion by making the site eligible to receive federal funds while preserving Angel Island's status as a California State Park."

Although no dollars are attached to this authorizing legislation, enacting the bill would open the door to federal support in the future, despite Angel Island's status as a State-owned property. The bill would authorize up to \$15

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AIISF WELCOMES NEW EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR DAPHNE KWOK



AIISF's new Executive Director Daphne Kwok.

AIISF is proud to announce the hiring of Daphne Kwok to the position of Executive Director. Along with a demonstrated lifelong commitment to the Asian/Pacific Islander American community, she brings over 20 years of experience in building and leading national Asian/Pacific Islander American organizations and developing national coalitions and networks.

"I am deeply honored to have been selected to work with AIISF as it embarks on an exciting journey to raise the status of Angel Island to the national prominence that it deserves in our American history," said Ms. Kwok. "The solid foundation has been laid by so many committed individuals at AIISF, many of whom I worked with while I was Executive Director of the Organization of Chinese Americans. I am eager and ready to make my contribution as well."

Most recently, Ms. Kwok served as Executive Director of the Asian Pacific American Institute for Congressional Studies, a national non-partisan, non-profit organization established to increase Asian Pacific American (APA) participation in public policy and the political process. She also was the Executive Director of the Organization of Chinese Americans (OCA), a non-profit civil rights organization with more than 10,000 members

in 45 chapters and 37 college-affiliate chapters throughout the United States.

Ms. Kwok also served as the first elected Chair of the National Council of Asian Pacific Americans, a network of national APA organizations, and coordinated a national voter registration campaign. Ms. Kwok currently serves on the boards of a wide range of organizations including the Asian and Pacific Islander American Scholarship Fund, Southeast Asia Resource Action Center, National Coalition of Asian Pacific American Community Development, and the Asian Pacific American Caucus of the American Political Science Association. Her numerous honors include receiving The Women at the Top of the Game Award in 2001 and being named one of *A Magazine's* "One Hundred Most Influential Asian Americans of the Past Decade" and *World Journal's* "Top 100 North American Chinese."

Ms. Kwok graduated from Wesleyan University in 1984 with a B.A. in East Asian Studies and Music, and later became the first Asian American member of the university's Board of Trustees. She also received a Master in Public Administration from Baruch College of the City University of New York, through a National Urban Fellowship.

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Angel Island Immigration Station Foundation is pleased to announce its new mission statement:

The mission of the Angel Island Immigration Station Foundation is to promote a greater understanding of Pacific Coast immigration and its role in shaping America's past, present, and future. Through an array of interpretive programs and educational partnerships, the Foundation preserves the Immigration Station site, a National Historic Landmark, as a place that honors the complex story and rich cultural heritage of Pacific Coast immigrants and their descendants.

President's Message

Dear Friends and Supporters:

This new year has been thus far an auspicious one for AIISF. We have achieved a number of major successes and are poised to embark on a national fundraising and awareness campaign to complete the restoration of Angel Island Immigration Station by 2010, the year that marks the 100th anniversary of the establishment of the Immigration Station.

The most exciting piece of news is that AIISF has selected its new Executive Director.

Daphne Kwok comes to us with a plethora of experience on the national scene, featuring long and noteworthy stints as Executive Director of the Organization of Chinese Americans (OCA) and Executive Director of the Asian Pacific American Institute for Congressional Studies (APICS). Daphne is a leader of national stature and reputation, and is absolutely the right person to lead the organization as we enter our national campaign.

On the fundraising front, AIISF was awarded a \$3 million grant from the California Cultural and Historical Endowment (CCHE) late last year for our \$50 million restoration campaign. Projects throughout California applied for the highly competitive CCHE grant program, and AIISF was awarded the second largest sum among all the grantees.

Our annual fundraising dinner is scheduled for Thursday, October 6, on the Hornblower Cruise Ship, the Belle. The dinner cruise includes a boat

tour of Angel Island and dinner by sunset at the Golden Gate. We encourage all of our supporters to attend this unique and entertaining event to raise general funds for the organization.

As we continue to successfully raise funds for the \$50 million restoration campaign, we think it is important to remind you that none of these dollars go toward the organization's general operating expenses. We depend on your tax-deductible contributions to sustain our office, our staff and the good work that we do as community stewards of the Immigration Station and its legacy.

Finally, my two terms as the President of the AIISF Board of Directors will come to an end in June. It has been both a pleasure and honor to lead this board of amazing and dedicated people through a period of great activity and growth. Our current Board vice president, Kathy Owyang Turner, will be the next board president effective June 1. I am certain that AIISF will continue to build on the growing momentum of its restoration campaign under Kathy's skillful and talented leadership.

I also want to express my thanks to Chuck Greene, AIISF's Interim Executive Director, who skillfully guided our organization for the past year with great aplomb, graciousness, optimism and vision.

Warm Regards,

Forrest Gok
President, Board of Directors

PASSAGES

A newsletter published by the
Angel Island Immigration Station Foundation
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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.

In The News

State Historical Fund Recommends \$3 Million for Immigration Station

AIISF recently was selected as one of 33 finalists to receive grants from the California Cultural and Historical Endowment (CCHE). These grants are the first distribution cycle of Proposition 40 bond funds. Passed by California voters in 2002, Proposition 40 called for the creation of the CCHE to support the "acquisition, development, preservation, and interpretation of buildings, structures, sites, places, and artifacts that preserve and demonstrate culturally significant aspects of California's history and for grants for these purposes." The CCHE Board's recommended grant of \$3 million to AIISF is the second largest grant awarded in

this inaugural cycle. CCHE funds will support Phase II of the five-phase project of restoring Angel Island Immigration Station. Phase II will involve the renovation and preservation of the Immigration Station hospital as a museum, interpretative center, library, assembly area, and research and administrative center.

Immigration Station Restoration Project Update

Major construction on Phase I of the Angel Island Immigration Station restoration project has been delayed and is expected to start in summer 2005. The primary work of Phase I will include: renovating the detention barracks and installing new exhibits there; creating an Administrative Building footprint; rebuilding a

covered staircase leading to the bar racks; upgrading site utilities; establishing a new road around the Immigration Site; and carefully removing trees to create new sight lines. (Prior to the tree removal, a resource ecologist will conduct a bird survey of the trees to ensure that the project does not displace any nesting raptors.) Work on Phase I is poised to start in the near future, as potential contractors have bid on the project, and the potential selected contractor's paperwork has been submitted to State offices for authorization.

The Immigration Station site will be closed to visitors during the year-long construction phase. School and public tours will continue at a temporary visitors center during the restoration efforts. For information about tours and reservations, call Casey Lee at (415) 435-3522.

New Stories from the Immigration Station: Angel Island Oral History Project

“Throughout my life I’ve always learned from secondary sources, like teachers, professors, textbooks, videos, etc., and there I was sitting right across from someone who went through Angel Island. In addition, he was enthusiastically telling me about his life. This to me was one of the greatest gifts of all.”—Phong Chau, UC Davis Student and participant in the Angel Island Oral History Project

Since fall 2004, students like Ms. Chau have been interviewing immigrants who came through Angel Island, as part of the next round of the Angel Island Oral History Project. This project is a partnership between AIISF and the Pacific Regional Humanities Center (PRHC) based at the University of California, Davis. PRHC is one of nine regional humanities centers established via a special National Endowment for the Humanities competition. The mission of PRHC is to generate, convene and broker humanities research, education and public programs for the U.S. Pacific region, encompassing California, Oregon, Washington, Alaska, Hawaii and the U.S. Pacific territories.

Giving Voice to the Stories of Angel Island

The term “oral history” refers to recorded interviews with individuals who describe the past, in many cases through first-person reminiscences. Oral history interviews create valuable new knowledge about the past and are a source of new interpretive perspectives on it. The current work of the Angel Island Oral History Project continues and draws on research and collection efforts done by Judy Yung in 1989-90 through the Asian American Studies Department at the University of California, Berkeley. UC Berkeley Professors Ling-chi Wang and Him Mark Lai served as co-directors of that original project. Oral history interviews have provided much of the basis for what historians know today about Angel Island Immigration Station.

The goal of this new stage of the Angel Island Oral History Project is to record and transcribe additional interviews about the experiences, recollections and impressions of immigrants and travelers who came through Angel Island Immigration Station during its years of operation, from 1910 to 1940. These first-hand accounts foster a deeper understanding of the Angel Island immigrant experience, in particu-

lar when combined with other sources, such as the carved poetry found on the detention barracks and documents from the National Archives.

In fall 2004, Prof. Georges Van Den Abbeele, Oral History Project Director, and Project Coordinator Dr. Jan Goggans trained a group of 12 student researchers from UC Davis to take oral histories. Students were introduced to main research resources on Angel Island and developed an understanding of the history of the Immigration Station in preparation for conducting the interviews. The student researchers also were instructed in oral history standards and methodology, including recording and basic interview skills. Currently, an additional group of seven students is interviewing other Angel Island former detainees. The following are a few of the stories that have been collected by the project to date.

A View of the Fire: Myron Wong

Mr. Wong was born in the Canton Province of China in 1929, and in 1940 left for the United States from Hong Kong aboard the *SS President Coolidge*. He arrived at Angel Island two days after the Treasure Island World’s Fair closed and was detained at the Immigration Station for about a month. His interrogation was delayed due to the fire that destroyed the Administration Building. After his time at Angel Island, Mr. Wong settled in Fresno and later Los Angeles, working as a retailer in the produce and liquor businesses. Mr. Wong shared what he remembered about the Administration Building fire:

“Then one night at midnight, suddenly, somewhere this guard came and kicked the door open. We didn’t understand English, but we knew that the door was there for fire. And when he opened the door—boy, we saw the sky lit up; red light on top of a roof. My brother and I jumped out of there, ran outside. Boy, we got so scared, so we ran back and got some clothes on and some blankets and then ran back out. So everybody was running out, but actually, at nighttime the fire always looks closer than it actually is.

“So we ran up the yard, away from the building because we saw the fire. But everybody was calm. Nobody was panicking or anything, we just ran. I think later they told us that it started in the kitchen, and then went in the women’s dormitory. It burned down the women’s dormitory. I remember a horse stable—with the horses inside. We stayed there overnight. In the morning they gave us a canteen to eat up there, like in the



Hoses snake along the pier after the Administration Building fire, 1940.

COURTESY OF MRS. MOONEN

army. Everybody got one of those canteens and ate over there. Then later they sent us back to the dormitory, but we had to eat in the bad, bad basketball court for a whole week, because the kitchen wasn’t fixed up yet.”

Fleeing the Nazis: Alice Steiner

Alice Steiner emigrated from Vienna, Austria, to the United States through Angel Island in 1940. Because of Hitler’s annexation of Austria, Mrs. Steiner—then only 15 years old—was required to leave school, and her father’s business was “taken over.” Her father fled first to San Domingo, Italy but because of Italy’s entry into the war, Mrs. Steiner and her mother were unable to join him. They applied for immigration via the system of sponsors that the U.S. government had set up to allow passage to Jewish immigrants fleeing Europe. Because ships were not permitted to land in Axis countries, Mrs. Steiner and her mother fled through Russia on the Siberian Express stopping in Harbin. “It was a tedious journey but I was so glad to get out of there,” she recounts. Mrs. Steiner arrived at Angel Island after traveling on a Japanese steamship where she was seasick. She relays her experience on Angel Island:

“We got to Angel Island and the officials were very nice. They were shocked because all my clothes hung on me [laughs] after I lost 20 pounds [from the journey]...so that they saw that I ate and I didn’t like anything. Finally they let us out. We needed a ticket to Milwaukee, because our sponsor lived in Milwaukee and we didn’t have money for the ticket, and we were released from Angel Island, which was a very nice place except for the milk.”

After leaving Angel Island, Mrs. Steiner boarded a train from San Francisco to Milwaukee, where her sponsor found her a job as a salesgirl in a bakery. Mrs. Steiner later moved to Oakland where she lived for 53 years. She has three children and many grandchildren.

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History Corner, continued

Getting the Paper Story Right: Benjamin Choy

Because of the strict limits on immigration established by the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, some Chinese immigrants adopted false identities, becoming “paper sons or daughters.” By “proving” that they were children of American citizens, immigrants were exempted from immigration prohibitions and could enter the country. All Chinese thus were considered suspect and had to prove their identities by matching details about their lives, homes and families with those of their relatives in the United States. Benjamin Choy came to the United States from a village near Macao in 1930. He traveled on the SS *President McKinley* with his “paper brother,” who was from a different family from a different village. He shares how his interrogation answers became the basis for his alleged brother’s answers:

“And when it came to the interrogation, by the examiner, they called me first, and the examiner asked me questions. Where did I live? How was my house built? I had to give him an idea of what it looks like, and how many rooms, and so forth. So I described it according to my house! [Laughter] I told the examiner about my actual house. So what I told him, my paper brother would not know that. Because he’s from a different family, different names, but on paper it was the same name. So, during the lunch break, I went to inform my paper brother about the facts that I told the examiner. You know we couldn’t be brothers if we said different things! But he said exactly what I said. I think that’s why the examiner believed we were brothers.”

After leaving the island, Mr. Choy enrolled in school and worked as a houseboy. He built victory ships in Richmond during World War II, worked as an electrical system designer for Bechtel, and later opened a real estate office in Chinatown. He has written five original songs and five plays. AIISF regrets that Mr. Choy passed away in February 2005.

An Ongoing Process of Sharing and Remembrance

The story of the Angel Island detainees is emblematic of the arrival experience, where dreams of opportunity met the unexpected reality of interrogation and detention. Oral histories also eloquently show the degree of agency attained by individuals who had lived within deeply constraining circumstances. These new oral histories will be incorporated into interpretive displays on Angel Island,

AIISF’s educational projects and a new book covering Angel Island and its place in the history of Pacific Coast immigration. A public archive of the oral histories will be located at UC Davis and also made available online. In conducted recorded interviews of the former detainees, AIISF hopes to preserve not only a record of the real-life conditions at the Immigration Station, but also to explore and share the individual lives from which Angel Island’s legacy extends.

The Angel Island Oral History Project is made possible through funding from the California Council for the Humanities California Stories Fund. Special thanks to all the UC Davis students who participated as researchers in the project and AIISF interns Jasmin Ho and Sharon Wong. AIISF is also grateful to Professor Georges Van Den Abbeele, Dr. Jan Goggans and Project Coordinator Aaron DiFranco for all their work on the Angel Island Oral History Project and Judy Yung, Professor Emeritus at UC Santa Cruz for her guidance. AIISF also would like to thank William Greene and Dan Nealand at the National Archives Records Administration in San Bruno for their assistance in finding the case files of the interviewees. Lastly, AIISF especially extends our deep appreciation to all the interviewees who have shared their stories, memories and experiences—with us and with future generations.

AIISF is still seeking participants willing to tell their stories of arrival and detention at Angel Island Immigration Station. If you would like to know more about the Angel Island Oral History Project, please contact AIISF (415-561-2160, info@aiisf.org) or the Pacific Regional Humanities Center (530-752-9857, prhc@ucdavis.edu).

Lela E. Swasey: Memoirs of an Immigration Station Secretary

We at AIISF were pleased to recently meet William and Shirley Swasey. Mr. Swasey’s parents met at the Immigration Station, where his mother, Lela Elise Dinklage Swasey, was a secretary in the Administration Building from 1912 to 1918 and his father was an immigration officer from 1915 to 1920. Mr. Swasey’s possessions are his mother’s pictures from the Immigration Station and some written accounts of her memories of working there. Mr. and Mrs. Swasey recently donated these photos and writings to AIISF. Here are a few of these photos and excerpts from Lela Swasey’s writing:



Lela Elise Dinklage Swasey (left) with two other women at the Angel Island Immigration Station, c.1912-1918.

“In 1912 I transferred from the Customs Service in Honolulu to the Immigration Service in San Francisco. The city office was in the old appraiser’s building on Sansome Street, but the main office was located on Angel Island. I brought my record showing that I had been a stenographer for the Collection of Port and it was a good report. They telephoned to several places and finally told me that there was a situation open at the Immigration Station on Angel Island—at \$900 a year. I was anxious to get placed so they made arrangements for me the next day.

“The Steamer the Angel Island left from Pier 5. Although the first trip left earlier, the administrative and clerical staff left at 9:15 a.m. The trip took 30 minutes. The Angel Island made another trip in the middle of the day, convenient for attorneys to come over. We left the island at 4:15 p.m. There were many hazardous trips as we backed out of Pier 5 into the path of oncoming ships to and from the Golden Gate.



Front entrance to the Angel Island Immigration Station, c.1912-1918.

“The Immigration Station had several buildings located in a sheltered cove on the Easterly–Northeasterly side of the island facing toward Richmond. The [Administration Building] was a large white one at the end of the pier where the Angel Island tied up. As you entered the building there was a large area for information, etc. and where aliens met their friends or attorneys. To the left were the commissioner’s office and the assistants—the filing division and places for in

continued on next page

History Corner, continued

which the Chinese immigrants were questioned. To the right were the deportation and immigration divisions. At first I was put in the Chinese division where all newcomers came, but it was noted that I took very good shorthand so I was sent

to the division where the immigrants sometimes spoke English so an interpreter was not needed.

"When I was employed at the Island, I never went up to the station detention wards. The

detention sheds housed, at times a couple of thousand aliens, mostly Orientals [Asians]. A couple of girls and I went up to the kitchen in order to see the enormous vats where rice was cooked, rice being the staple of life for the Chinese. I never went to any other place on the island except the hospital, which was a white building on the hill to the left of the main building. In speaking of the left and the right I am facing the main building from the dock."

Lela and William Swasey were married in 1919 and lived in San Francisco until 1928 when they relocated to Santa Cruz. In 1948 Lela was elected Santa Cruz County recorder, a position she served for 12 years. She passed away in 1987 at age 99.

AIISF is looking for any writings, testimonies, memoirs, documents, photos, artifacts or artwork related to the experience of immigrants, staff members or their families at Angel Island Immigration Station, for use in a new book project and in exhibits in the soon-to-be-restored detention barracks. Items such as discharge papers allowing immigrants to leave Angel Island or an old piece of luggage that was brought and stored until immigrants were able to leave would be valuable. Even little

mementos that immigrants brought over with them—i.e., a cigar box full of memorabilia—would be interesting if tied to a personal story or experience. Also, photographs of the Immigration Station interior or exterior would be especially helpful in showing what furnishings and other accoutrements would have been at the Immigration Station. If you have any of these various items, we'd appreciate hearing from you. Please contact AIISF at 415-561-2160 or info@aiisf.org.

Thank You

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News, continued

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million of federal funds for the Angel Island Immigration Station restoration project. To date, the Immigration Station has secured nearly \$18.5 million for the restoration efforts from private foundations and federal and state government sources.

"Today, we took an important step toward acknowledging the importance of this nation's 'western Ellis Island,'" said Rep. Souder. "Angel Island's historical and cultural significance demands that we properly recognize this threshold of America and preserve it for generations to follow. The current state of the island's structures is simply not sustainable."



AIISF Board Members Felicia Lowe and Kathy Turner with Irene Bueno and Senator Daniel Inouye

On April 28, AIISF Board members Felicia Lowe and Kathy Owyang Turner traveled to Capitol Hill, where Ms. Lowe testified before the Subcommittee on National Parks, Recreation and Public Land of the Senate Committee on Resources. "It is of national significance, and at the time of its operation it was a federal station enforcing federal laws," Felicia Lowe testified. "Its role in immigration history is virtually unknown—a dramatic contrast to the stories of Ellis Island."

"The trip to Washington, D.C., was particularly meaningful. I was able to speak as a descendant of Angel Island detainees to underscore the importance of federal support for the preservation and restoration of the site and all that it represents," said Ms. Lowe.

This legislation is a significant step to gaining federal funding and AIISF awaits the Senate's decision. AIISF plans to keep its supporters informed of further progress via our Web site, in our monthly electronic bulletin and in future issues of Passages. We will alert you in event that letters of support are necessary to secure the passage of this appropriations bill.

EXECUTIVEDIRECTOR *continued from page 1*

"Being able to harness all of my experience working on behalf of the Asian/Pacific Islander American community from the national level in Washington D.C., and focusing my energy and passion into helping develop the Angel Island Immigration Station Foundation to national prominence and the next stage in its history, is a challenge and opportunity that I would be honored to provide to the community and to this nation," Ms. Kwok said.

"We extend a warm welcome to our new executive director, Daphne Kwok, a nationally-recognized community leader of great reputation and with a successful track record" said Forrest Gok, President of the AIISF Board of Directors.

Ms. Kwok will assume her role as Executive Director on July 1. At that time, AIISF will bid a fond farewell to Interim Executive Director Chuck Greene, who has guided our growth and strengthened our organization over the past 11 months. "AIISF is extremely grateful to Chuck Greene for his exemplary stewardship of the organization for past year," said Forrest Gok. Mr. Greene's experience and good humor will be missed.