Picnic Attendees Visit the Station before Closure

Over 300 people joined AIISF, California State Parks and the Angel Island Association for a community picnic on August 13, 2005. The event offered a last chance to see the Immigration Station barracks before the site closed for a 14- to 18-month period for restoration work.

The picnic featured special tours of the Immigration Station, film screenings and readings by children’s book authors Li Keng Wong and Milly Lee, who both have books about Angel Island being published next year. Also, Bill Greene of the National Archives Pacific Region led a workshop on how to research family history at the archives.

Picnic attendee John Shockley, visiting from Hawaii, commented, "While walking up to the Immigration Station, I had the chance to speak with some of the descendents of Chinese detainees. The stories were heartbreaking and wonderful. Heartbreaking because of the trials, wonderful because of the triumph of the immigrants."

AIISF is grateful for all the volunteers who helped throughout the day and for the support of the Look Lowe Family Trust and the AIISF Descendants Club which made this special community event possible.

"I was overjoyed to see the inroads made by AIISF and others to preserve the landmarks, but more importantly the history and stories of detainees,” remarked attendee, Judy Lee. “Our docent Joe Chan made such an impression on my 13-year-old nephew, Nicholas, and his 9-year-old brother, Elijah, that they both decided to help research and chronicle their grandfather Len’s story. The AIISF ‘celebration day’ on August 13 inspired me to tell my father’s story to the next generation and those to come.”

A multi-generational crowd, including young Shelley Kwok (right) attended the picnic which kicked off an intensive period of restoration efforts at AIISF.
MAKING WAVES
RAISES FUNDS FOR AIISF

On October 6, AIISF supporters helped raise more than $100,000 through our annual event. The “Making Waves” cruise was held aboard the San Francisco Belle, Hornblower Cruises’ 292-foot sternwheeler. The event included cocktails on deck followed by a cruise around Angel Island during dinner.

During the dinner, AIISF honored several individuals who have played key roles in the preservation and restoration of Angel Island Immigration Station. California State Parks Director Ruth Coleman has demonstrated unswerving commitment to California State Parks’ partnership with AIISF in preserving the Angel Island Immigration Station site. Most recently, her leadership made it possible for AIISF to prepare for Phase II of the preservation work.

Michael Groza recently retired from his position as vice president for community outreach at the Marin Community Foundation (MCF). For AIISF, Mr. Groza and MCF have been sustaining supporters from the very start, pushing AIISF to dream large and to see Angel Island Immigration Station as a world-class destination for learning and reflection. With Mr. Groza’s retirement, AIISF will miss its champion. Bill Ong Hing is an Angel Island descendent and has been a pioneering figure for his personal accomplishments as a long-time advocate in immigration law. Former AIISF Interim Executive Director Charles F. Greene guided the organization for a year, leading the development of restoration and educational efforts to spread the untold Angel Island story.

The evening was hosted by writer, musician and historian Charlie Chin, and featured musical performances by the David Parker Quintet. Proceeds from “Making Waves” go toward AIISF’s 2005 Annual Fund drive, which supports the organization’s education programs and advocacy work.

SENATE APPROVES BILL TO RESTORE IMMIGRATION STATION

On November 16, the Senate unanimously approved H.R. 606/S.262, “The Angel Island Immigration Station Restoration & Preservation Act.” The bill now awaits the President’s signature. The bill will authorize up to $15 million in future federal support to preserve and restore the Angel Island Immigration Station. Although no funds are allocated by this authorizing legislation, enacting the bill will open the door to federal support in the future due to Angel Island’s status as a state-owned property.

U.S. Senator Dianne Feinstein of California, sponsor of the bill, stated, “The American story is one of immigrants coming to this land and building a better life for themselves, for their children and grandchildren.” Senator Feinstein said, ”In the west, that story often began at Angel Island. So just as we have preserved Ellis Island in the East, it is time for the federal government to make an equal commit-

continued on page 5
Construction Work Starts on Angel Island Restoration

Major construction for the restoration of Angel Island Immigration Station started on the site in August and is expected to last for 14 to 18 months. Trees already have been removed to create better sightlines and protect the buildings from trees that might fall during a storm.

Phase I of the project will restore and furnish the detention barracks so visitors will see the rooms as they would have been in the 1910s and 1920s. A new lighting system will be installed in the detention barracks so that visitors can better view the poems etched on the barracks walls. Other Phase I work includes creating a footprint to convey the size, function, and importance of the former Administration Building, as well as rebuilding the covered stairway connecting the Administration Building and barracks.

School and public programs will continue

continued on page 5
Korean Immigrants on Angel Island

From 1910 to 1940, Angel Island Immigration Station was a major port of entry for many groups of immigrants from the Pacific Rim and Central and South America. Although less is known about Korean immigrants than about many other groups that came through Angel Island, the case files at the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) Pacific Region in San Bruno give researchers some picture of Koreans who arrived in San Francisco and were detained on the island.

It is estimated that between 1903 and 1920, about 8,000 Koreans left their homeland to settle in the United States. Korean immigrants—mostly men—arrived primarily in Hawaii, to meet growing labor needs, but some also went to the U.S. mainland. Early Korean immigrants came from varied educational and social backgrounds, and from different parts of the country, including the cities. Many of these immigrants, who were recent Christian converts, could read and write.

Immigration from Korea during the early 20th century was shaped largely by the country’s status as a colonial holding of Japan at that time. In 1904, Japan pressured the Korean government to surrender its sovereignty to Japan, and six years later Japan formally annexed Korea as a colony. In 1905, the Japanese government outlawed Korean emigration to ensure that Koreans could not compete with Japanese laborers for jobs in Hawaii. The edict also cut off the flow of migrants who might support Korean independence activities in the United States.

Under Japanese colonial rule, which lasted until 1945, the only Koreans allowed to leave the country legally were brides. In signing the Gentlemen’s Agreement with Japan in 1907, the United States agreed to allow Japanese wives and Japan’s colonial subjects—Korean wives to join their husbands in the United States, in exchange for Japan prohibiting the immigration of laborers to the United States. Korean men abroad were able to marry “picture brides,” chosen through photographs exchanged between the United States and Korea. About 1,000 Korean pictures brides arrived in Hawaii before 1924, and about 100 of these migrated to the Pacific Coast.

Many in the early Korean American community united around the common goal of securing Korea’s independence from Japanese colonial rule. During the Japanese occupation of Korea from 1910 to 1945, many Koreans in the United States thought of themselves more as exiles without a country than as immigrants. Japanese colonization riveted immigrant Koreans’ attention to news of conditions in their homeland; virtually all of these immigrants had relatives who suffered under the Japanese occupation of Korea, and others had to abandon plans to return home. A number of the leaders of the Korean independence movement lived and worked in the United States, seeking help from the U.S. government to free Korea, although to little avail.

Koreans seeking entry to the United States benefited from the Korean American community’s interest in and commitment to the political situation in Korea. Community support proved crucial at least in one critical case. Upon hearing about thirteen Korean students who had fled Korea without passports and were being held at Angel Island’s detention barracks and forbidden to pass through to the mainland, David Lee (Yi Tae-wi), a Korean minister of a San Francisco church, sent a telegram to the U.S. Secretary of State William Jennings Bryan. Lee argued that the students should not be sent back to Korea because Japanese authorities were sure to execute them. Lee also stated that they could not be returned to China, from where they had sailed, because they were not Chinese citizens. Bryan granted the minister’s request, setting a precedent that allowed Korean students to enter the United States without passports.

A small selection of eleven case files at the NARA Pacific Region reveals the ordeal that Korean students were subjected to at Angel Island. Almost all the men came to the United States via China, since Japan had closed travel to Koreans when it annexed the country in 1910. Upon entering the United States, Korean students needed to show proof of sponsorship because they lacked approved visas. Most of
these students provided oral testimony stating that their fathers were sponsoring their studies. In a manner similar to their exacting inspection of Chinese immigrants, Angel Island officials closely looked at the Korean students’ hands for evidence of their participation in manual labor. Talk Choo Ahn, who stayed on Angel Island for a month in 1917, was asked questions testing his knowledge of world history and culture, mathematics, and English. Officials also considered the men’s appearance, in particular their Western clothing, in determining admittance to the United States. In these cases the Korean men were detained as little as three days or as long as a month at Angel Island.

A particularly detailed case involved six Korean men who arrived on the steamship S.S. Mongolia on July 9, 1913. Upon their entry one official wrote:

“In view of the unusual circumstances in these cases it is felt that the matter should be presented to the Bureau [of Immigration] for instructions as to what course to pursue. It appears by the record that these aliens are Korean by birth, but they left Korea before Korea became under the sovereignty of Japan. They say they have no passports because they do not recognize Japanese sovereignty. Furthermore they appear to be students and not laborers and the contention is made that as students they are not required to have passports if the status as students is satisfactorily established.”

These cases show how the officials on Angel Island tried to interpret and implement immigration practices that affected not just individual people but also other governments’ policies. The Commissioner of General Immigration sought guidance regarding this case in a letter dated August 26, 1913:

“Referring to the cases of a number of Korean students, admitted after correspondence with

Bureau [of Immigration], under your No. 53615/34, I beg to advise you that the Secretary of the Japanese Association of America has made application for copies of the testimony, he stated that he was securing it for the Japanese Consul General who was interested to learn the movements of the applicants leaving Korea and coming to the United States and the circumstances which prompted the service to admit the men although they were not in possession of Japanese passports. The office denied the request for copies of the testimony but anticipates that there may be further application for the same. Will the Bureau please indicate whether our action was correct?”

The case went through multiple court hearings and required testimony from community leaders and preachers in the Korean immigrant community who testified to these men’s status, wealth and class by referring to and discussing their well-known families. On August 6, 1913 all but one of these students, who was in the hospital, were admitted.

The Immigration Act of 1924 put a virtual end to immigration from Asia, preventing even Asian spouses from joining their families in America. Between 1924 and 1952, only about 900 Korean students, as non-immigrants, were allowed to enter the United States. Korean students were no longer allowed to remain in the United States after completing their studies.

While the core of the Korean American community remained in San Francisco, there was a gradual migration of Koreans from San Francisco and surrounding rural areas in central and southern California, as employment opportunities opened up there. Koreans in California experienced the same kinds of discrimination that other Asian groups encountered, including being prohibited from attending school with whites in San Francisco, being unable to intermarry with whites (1901 California Anti-Miscegenation Law) and being unable to own land in California (1913 Alien Land Law).

The few cases of Korean American immigrants available at the NARA Pacific Region help researchers to learn more about those who came through Angel Island from Korea. Historians are continuing to use the writings, photographs and case files associated with the Angel Island Immigration Station to continue to learn more about the immigration experience on Angel Island.

**Author’s Note:** This article is based on the research of Jee-Eun R. Song, graduate student in Cultural Studies at University of California, Davis, who participated in the Angel Island Oral History Project organized by the Pacific Regional Humanities Center. Other sources include: Sucheng Chan’s *Asian Americans: An Interpretive History* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1991), Mary Paik Lee’s *Quiet Odyssey: A Pioneer Korean Woman in America* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1990) and Ronald Takaki’s *Strangers from a Different Shore* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1998). Special thanks to Richard S. Kim, Assistant Professor of Asian American Studies, UC Davis, for reviewing this article.

**Volunteers Needed for Angel Island Collections**

AIISF will be partnering with California State Parks on the new interpretive exhibits in the Immigration Station barracks. AIISF is looking for volunteers to help process the collections on Angel Island starting in January 2006. Volunteers are needed to clean and catalogue artifacts related to the living spaces in the barracks. Volunteer times are flexible to include both weekday and weekend time slots.

Volunteers also are needed to help sew the mattress covers that will furnish the restored barracks. The mattresses will be placed on bunks that will be added to three barracks rooms. All supplies for the mattress covers (fabric, thread, etc) will be provided. Please contact Erika Gee at 415-561-2160 if interested in these volunteer opportunities.
In 1999 the Immigration Station was named by the National Trust for Historic Preservation as one of "America's 11 Most Endangered Historic Places." It then became an official project of Save America's Treasures, a partnership between the National Trust and the White House Millennium Council.

AIIS is located in a California State Park. As such, it is unable to receive any additional federal dollars beyond the grants for which it has already qualified. HR 606/ S. 262 would allow the Immigration Station to receive additional federal monies.

It is my hope that Congress will pass Angel Island Immigration Station Restoration and Preservation Act (S 262 and HR 606) that will allow us to continue and expand our federal-state-private partnership in preserving and restoring this important part of our nation's history.

Sincerely,

Arnold Schwarzenegger

cc: The Honorable Dianne Feinstein
    The Honorable Barbara Boxer
    The Honorable Richard Pombo
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    The Honorable Lynn Woolsey
Thank You

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Gateway Exhibition Will Travel to Southern Orange County

AIISF’s traveling exhibit Gateway to Gold Mountain will be on display at Casa Romantica Cultural Center and Gardens in San Clemente, California, from January 17 through March 28, 2006. Casa Romantica is located in the historic Spanish Colonial Revival estate of San Clemente’s founder, Ole Hanson. Casa Romantica serves as a place for people of all ages to explore and understand Southern California history, architecture, ecology and culture. Casa Romantica is located at: 415 Avenida Granada, San Clemente, CA 92672. The Gateway exhibit will be on view during normal visitor hours, which are Tuesday 1 to 4 pm, and Wednesday to Sunday 11am to 4 pm. Admission fees are $3.00 for adults, free for those 12 and under. The last Wednesday of every month is free for everyone. For more information on Casa Romantica, please call 949-498-2139 or visit http://casaromantica.org/

Lucille Chan Remembered

Lucille D. Chan (Lim Poy), a longtime friend of AIISF, passed away on June 10, 2005.

Born in Detroit, Michigan, on January 30, 1922, she moved to China at the age of nine with her family. When the Japanese invaded Nanjing and Guangzhou, forcing her family to flee, she returned to the United States in 1940 to marry the late Lem Chan of Ft. Wayne, Indiana.

Even though she was a returning native-born U.S. citizen, Lucille was detained for three days at Angel Island Immigration Station because of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. Moving to Indiana, she married, raised son Joe, and learned the restaurant business. For more than 20 years, she and her husband successfully managed the Mandarin Inn in Muncie, Indiana. Although their restaurant was open 364 days a year, she was active in Pilots International and found time to restart her formal education, which had been interrupted by war in 1939. Lucille earned her GED diploma in 1974. In 1979 Lucille and Lem retired to Oakland, California, where she helped recent immigrants adjust to life in this country, volunteered with the USO at the Oakland Airport, and made friends while studying Mandarin Chinese at Laney College.

Because of her family’s immigrant roots and her life experiences helping relatives and friends to enter the United States, she was devoted to the work of the Angel Island Immigration Station Foundation and participated in the Angel Island Oral History Project before she passed away. Lucille will be greatly missed.