Memory and Forgetting at Angel Island Immigration Station

David Moles

School of Communication and Information, Rutgers University

580 Knowledge and Society

Catherine McGowan

December 24, 2022

Table of Contents

List of Figures

Memory and Forgetting at Angel Island Immigration Station

Introduction

From 1910 to 1940, as many as half a million immigrants, would-be immigrants, and foreign travelers passed through the Angel Island Immigration Station in San Francisco Bay.[1] In 1940, a fire destroyed the station's administration building, ending the site's use as an immigration processing facility; the U.S. Army made use of the site for a variety of purposes during the Second World War—most notably, to house prisoners of war—before declaring it surplus property in 1946 and turning it over to the State of California. While the island as a whole became a state park, the station itself remained vacant and neglected for more than two decades (Lee & Yung, 2010). In the 1970s, spurred by a park ranger's rediscovery of dozens of Chinese poems carved by detainees into the walls of the station's detention barracks, Asian American community activists launched a successful campaign to preserve the site from demolition and open an interpretive center on the site; in the 1990s, a more ambitious campaign began, culminating in the station's designation in 1997 as a National Historic Landmark and the subsequent major restorations in 2004-2009 of the detention barracks and its surroundings, and in 2010-2020 of the station hospital ("History of AIIS," n.d.).

The restoration of the Angel Island Immigration Station as a memory site has been highly successful in raising awareness of the history of immigration on the West Coast, of non-European immigration to the United States in general, of the exclusionary laws to which Asian and particularly Chinese immigrants were subject, and of their inhumane and unjust treatment by racist officials and a racially discriminatory legal regime. While framing the story of the "Ellis Island of the West" as "an American story of triumph and diversity" has helped cement the place of Asian immigrants in American society (Lee & Yung, 2010, pp. 310, 305), it has at the same time limited the ability of the site to articulate the variety and specificity of the Angel Island

immigrant experience, to reach beyond the station's period of operation to the ways in which that experience was forgotten and remembered, and to connect the history of detention at Angel Island to the at least equally inhumane and unjust detention of immigrants that continues in the present day.

Previous Work

Angel Island: Immigrant Gateway to America (2010), by historian Erika Lee and ethnic studies scholar Judy Yung, is considered the authoritative book-length history of the Angel Island station.[2] Yung's earlier collaboration with historian Him Mark Lai and poet Genny Lim, *Island: Poetry and History of Chinese Immigrants on Angel Island, 1910–1940* (1980; revised edition 2014) was instrumental in bringing wider attention not only to the detainees' poems and to the Angel Island station but to the Chinese American immigrant experience in general. Geographer Gareth Hoskins, who worked as a docent at Angel Island while performing fieldwork for his 2005 doctoral dissertation and experienced the site's transition from a local, volunteer-run facility to a professionalized National Historic Landmark subject to systematic management and strict interpretive criteria, has written extensively on the material and symbolic effects of that transition, and in general on the different actors, interests, and forces attempting to shape and control the site's historical narrative. Historian Anna Pegler-Gordon's 2021 *Closing the Golden Door: Asian Migration and the Hidden History of Exclusion at Ellis Island* provides useful context, documenting the ways in which the histories of both the Ellis Island and Angel Island stations are more complex than the sites' predominant narratives allow.

In addition to these works, I have also referred to the websites of the Angel Island Immigration Station Foundation, the Angel Island Conservancy, California State Parks, the National Park Service, and other relevant organizations, as well as the cultural landscape report prepared by Davison & Meier (2002) for the NPS and the archives of the *San Francisco*

Examiner, and to other relevant scholarship on Angel Island, Asian immigration, and related topics.

While the scholars named above, and others, have documented the history of the station in great detail, there has been relatively little work since Hoskins on the way in which that history has been memorialized. Lee & Yung provide an overview, as do Lai et al., while Bashford et al. (2016) provide an interesting discussion of the materiality of the site and the ways in which its structures and inscriptions evoke and relate to other memorial sites. But there has not yet been a comprehensive study updating Hoskins on the ways in which the site and the narrative related there have continued to evolve since 2010. In this project, I was limited by space, by time, and, as will be shown, by my own failure to adequately research the holiday opening hours of the Angel Island Immigration Station Museum. This is not, therefore, that comprehensive study, but it can, perhaps, suggest some directions for it.

Context

"The Finest Immigrant Station in the World"

Though inspired by the station constructed some two decades previously on Ellis Island in New York Harbor, the station on Angel Island was a product of a different political climate, and was arguably built to serve a different purpose, even as it enforced the same set of immigration laws. Ellis Island was built to regulate immigration, not to restrict it (Cannato, 2009, pg. 13), to bring what had hitherto been a haphazard state operation under Federal control; to exclude, in the words of Henry Cabot Lodge, "dangerous and undesirable elements", while allowing entry to the "desirable immigrant who seeks in good faith to become a citizen of the United States" (qtd. pg. 51). Angel Island, by contrast, was built in the wake of the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act, and in response to what was seen as the inadequacy of San Francisco's existing

facilities to enforce it (Lee & Yung, 2010, pp. 10-12); a new, state of the art facility would provide, in the words of San Francisco Commissioner of Immigration Hart Hyatt North, "a proper enforcement of the Chinese exclusion law" (qtd. pg. 14).[3] While Pegler-Gordon (2021) argues convincingly that Ellis Island in fact excluded Chinese immigrants at a higher rate than Angel Island even in the latter's early years, and even more so after the passage of the 1924 Immigration Act effectively barred not only Chinese but nearly all immigrants from Asia, Asians nonetheless made up only a relatively small fraction of Ellis Island arrivals, and Asian immigrants arriving at Ellis Island only a relatively small fraction of those entering the United States (pg. 22). At Angel Island, by contrast, according to Lee & Yung (2010), Asians represented nearly two-thirds of all arrivals, and Chinese more than half of that total (pg. 20).

Lai et al. (2014) estimate that 51 percent of Chinese arrivals in San Francisco were detained on Angel Island while the immigration station was in operation (pp. 339-342). Of those, roughly 9 percent were denied entry; in 1910, the station's first year of operation, the figure was more than 20 percent. Many of those denied appealed the decision—after 1919, nearly all—and roughly half of those appeals were sustained. Lee & Yung (2010), working with a somewhat different set of figures, estimate that only 7 percent of Chinese applicants for entry at Angel Island were ultimately excluded (pg. 93). Nonetheless, while arrivals from other nations were usually processed in days, detentions of Chinese, whether for medical reasons, pending interrogation, or pending appeal, regularly lasted weeks—the median waiting period was 16 days (Lai et al., pg. 15)—and as appeals worked their way through the immigration administration and the courts, could stretch to months or even years.[4]

Detention facilities at what the San Francisco Chronicle called the "finest Immigrant Station in the World" (Aug. 18, 1908, qtd. in Lee & Yung, p. 13) and what the San Francisco Examiner called a "Splendid Group of Buildings" ("New Immigration Station Abandoned",

1909) were unsanitary and overcrowded; the food, particularly that served to Asians, was of poor quality, and Chinese detainees were allowed no visitors and very little recreation (Lee & Yung, pp. 95, 61-64). The immigration service cultivated a culture of anti-Chinese racism, in which detainees were often physically mistreated, as well as made subject to arbitrary procedures and requirements with no purpose but to inflict, in the words of Collector of Customs John P. Jackson, "moral terror"; this racism extended to a refusal to hire Chinese interpreters, or even white interpreters "affiliated" with Chinese, a position which severely restricted officials' ability to find qualified candidates (Lee, 2003, pp. 57-61). Interrogations were were "extensive, exhaustive ordeals", as racist officials sought to dismantle claims to U.S. citizenship, membership in privileged economic classes, or relationships to already-admitted permanent residents—many of which claims were, in fact, fraudulent (Lee & Yung, pp. 70, 84-85). This "crooked path", as one former detainee called it, was often the only one available while the exclusion laws were in effect.

"Bad Memories"

Lee & Yung (2010) each document how they grew up with no awareness of their own families' immigration histories and connections to Angel Island, how Yung learned of her father's time as a detainee only after the discovery of the detention station poems in 1975 (pg. xvi), how Lee's grandparents told her nothing of their immigrant experience until she questioned them directly after beginning to study Asian American history as a college student (pg. xviii). When Lai et al. (2014) set out to gather oral histories to accompany the translation and publication of the poems in *Island*, they found most subjects reluctant to be interviewed, unwilling to "dredge up bad memories" (pg. 197). It was only after the publication of *Island*'s first edition in 1980 and the recognition that, rather than damaging the reputations of the individuals interviewed or of the Chinese American community, the book had been received as a

"tribute to their courage and perseverance in the face of adversity" (pg. 198) that they found former detainees willing not only to be interviewed but to consent to the interviews in writing and to allow them to be published under the interviewees' real names.

The rediscovery of Angel Island coincided with an increase in Asian American ethnic identification and a concomitant increase in activism. Along with other sites such as the Manzanar internment camp in which Japanese Americans were incarcerated during World War Two, the Angel Island Immigration Station became a focus of ethnic pride, a reminder both of past anti-Asian discrimination and of Asian immigrants' struggle against and survival under that discrimination (Lee & Yung, 2010, pg. 304). Among scholars, Angel Island came to be seen as a corrective to historical narratives that centered the European immigrant experience and "excluded Asians from the immigrant canon" (Daniels, 1997, pg. 14). Ellis Island and Angel Island, Pegler-Gordon (2021) argues, came to represent competing models of immigration and exclusion: the Ellis Island model—focused on the station's first three decades of operation, before the 1924 Immigration Act transformed it from an immigration station to a detention and deportation center—foregrounding "the relatively free immigration of racially unmarked Europeans"; the Angel Island model, by contrast, emphasizing "the centrality of race and exclusion in U.S. immigration policy" (pp. 19-20). Where the immigration station at Ellis Island has become "a living monument to the story of the American people" ("National Immigration Museum", n.d.) "something akin to a national shrine" (Cannato, pg. 408), that at Angel Island is positioned as both "a place for reflection on the very personal immigrant experience" and "a place of reconciliation for the wrongs that were done and the human rights we must uphold" (Angel Island Immigration Station president Kathy Lim Ko in 2009, qtd. in Lee & Yung, pg. 313).

Interpretation

To Angel Island

In April 1949, more than fifteen thousand visitors "swarmed" onto an Angel Island recently declared surplus by the War Assets Administration (Lenn, 1949, pg. 1). Almost as many were left on the shore due to lack of transportation. Those who reached the island found "a potential island playground on their front doorstep," with "wooded acres," "sheltered coves," and "ideal picnic spots." In the discussion of the Island's attractions, the Immigration Station merited only a brief mention, along with other "vestiges of Angel Island's recent past" like the derelict Army barracks; more space was given to the island's history as a horse and cattle ranch in Spanish California. Visitors "lazed in the sun, swam, fished off the piers, hiked and picnicked". Promoters of the event, who hoped to convince the City of San Francisco to take Angel Island over as a recreation area, counted "Angel Island Day" a smashing success.

On this cold Wednesday morning in late November 2022, the day before Thanksgiving, only a few dozen people are lined up outside Gate B of the San Francisco Ferry Terminal for the twice-daily boat to Angel Island. In a good year, Angel Island State Park might receive 175,000 visitors; with the COVID-19 pandemic, the last few years have not been good ones ("Ferry Service From Angel Island to SF May End", 2020), and this is the off season. Immediately in front of me is a South Asian family, a grandmother, three women who might be daughters or daughters-in-law, four children aged perhaps three to twelve; as the line starts to move three sons or sons-in-law arrive carrying coffee. There is a couple in their twenties, one white, one Asian, both with bicycles. There are a few families of white tourists, adults and teens; a pair of elderly white hikers; a young Asian woman in a camel greatcoat, apparently alone. And there is myself: white, middle-aged, in boots and jeans and a flannel shirt and a Patagonia barn coat that aren't

quite adequate to the Bay cold but will shortly prove much too warm for the Angel Island hiking trails.

My academic background is in the history of colonialism and imperialism, and before that, in linguistics and East Asian studies. My undergraduate thesis in Japanese, at the University of California, Santa Cruz, centered on the Japanese immigrant experience in the Pacific Northwest in the early 20th century as documented in three stories by Nagai Kafū, a Japanese writer who lived in the United States from 1903 to 1907. In researching the context of those stories, I naturally came into contact not only with the history of anti-Japanese sentiment and their eventual exclusion, but with the prior history of agitation against the Chinese, and of the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act. I was, therefore, broadly aware of the Angel Island Immigration Station's existence, and of the harsh treatment of Chinese immigrants relative to other groups, but prior to this project had little knowledge of the specifics. I have visited Angel Island once before, in May 2012; my sister, my mother, my fiancée, and I brought bicycles, and rode around the island counterclockwise; by the time we reached the Immigration Station, four-fifths of the way around, we were concerned only with getting back to the ferry before it departed, and did not stop.

This is my first visit to the station. It's hard not to assume the other passengers are headed there as well, but of course, most of them are not.

"All the other stuff"

In 2001, Surry Blackburn, head of the nonprofit Angel Island Association, told Gareth Hoskins, "I don't want the rest of the island to disappear because of the Immigration Station"; Blackburn would lead visitors counterclockwise, along the same route I would follow a decade later, making sure they saw "all the other stuff" the island had to offer (Hoskins, 2005, p. 63).[5] At the time Hoskins interviewed Blackburn, the intent of the Immigration Station restoration project

was to build a new pier at the station itself, in place of the original, long since destroyed (Figure 1), where detainees arrived for thirty years. Visitors to the station would thus arrive directly from San Francisco at the location that is the start of the station tour, approximating even more closely the experience of those detainees in whose place the visitors are asked to imagine themselves (2005, p. 63). This has yet to take place. Visitors, regardless of their reasons for coming to Angel Island, arrive instead at the site of the older quarantine station in Ayala Cove (formerly, Hospital Cove), roughly a mile from the Immigration Station gates, counterclockwise along the island's perimeter road.

There is not much left of the quarantine station; most of the more than forty buildings that once stood on the site were razed in 1957 ("Quarantine Station", n.d.). Wednesday through Friday in the warm months, and on weekends even in the winter, the Angel Island Recreation Company—a privately owned company that holds the concession for food, transportation, and recreation services on the island—operates a twice-daily shuttle service from Ayala Cove to the Immigration Station ("Angel Island Company"). On this November Wednesday the shuttle service is not operating; nor is the bicycle rental stand; nor the café. The Angel Island Cantina ("the place for festive fun on Angel Island") is closed indefinitely due to the pandemic. The Immigration Station museum, though ordinarily open Wednesday through Sunday, is today also closed due to the Thanksgiving holiday, as I discover in the State Park's Visitor Center (Figure 3), in a notice pinned to a bulletin board, between a printout of the ferry schedule and a copy of a news article with the headline "Selfies: Worst thing to happen to seal pups since orcas, says Marine Mammal Center". The Visitor Center's small museum reflects Blackburn's priorities, glossing over the Immigration Station in a few words and images (Figure 4), while dwelling at length on the military history of the island.

I start walking.

"Not a place of welcome"

On foot, by the shortest route, one arrives at the Immigration Station obliquely, and from above. As the well-paved perimeter road reaches China Cove there appears a line of wooden posts perhaps seven feet tall, set in concrete and strung with wire mesh, dividing the Immigration Station site from the road—elsewhere open on either side to the ubiquitous deer and coyotes, and presumably to ill-advised hikers as well. The fence is not original, but fences of a similar construction are visible in some photographs of the site included in the Cultural Landscape Report commissioned by the National Park Service (Figure 5), and a fence in approximately the same location is indicated on the report's plan of the site as it existed in 1940 (Figure 6). The fence thus serves as part of the site's partially reconstructed period landscape, and undoubtedly helps protect the site from erosion and other damage that would otherwise be caused by visitors finding their own paths through the eucalyptus groves; but it also serves to direct visitors toward the Immigration Station entrance, with its site plan and interpretive panel (Figure 7).[6]

If the Visitor Center museum addresses the Immigration Station only briefly, glosses over the station's fundamentally exclusionary role, and speaks only of "Asian immigrants", the panel at the station entrance is more direct: "Although it is often compared to Ellis Island, Angel Island was not a place of welcome. Instead, it was used to keep immigrants, specifically those from China, out." The question of how specifically to treat the experience of immigrants from China in memorializing the station has been somewhat fraught. While Lee & Yung (2010) are at great pains to give equal weight in their book to the stories of Japanese, South Asian, Korean, Mexican, Filipino, and Russian and Jewish immigrants on Angel Island—to redress, in fact, the focus of previous Angel Island scholarship on the Chinese experience at the expense of that of other groups—they also document the station's origins in the Chinese exclusion laws and the way in which the Chinese experience of intense interrogation and lengthy detention was unique

(pg. 16). It was the rediscovery of the Chinese poems in the detention barracks that first spurred interest in preserving the station, and the Chinese American community that led the campaign to see it preserved (pp. 304-305).

Near the interpretive panel, however, is the bronze plaque certifying the Immigration Station's status as a National Historic Landmark (Figure 8). While Lee & Yung write only that the first application for that status failed in 1994, and that the second application, rewritten by Philip Choy, succeeded in 1997 (pg. 309), Hoskins (2004) documents how the critical element in rewriting the application was "tactical inclusion": including "groups other than the Chinese" and incorporating the brief use of the station in housing enemy aliens and prisoners of war during World War Two (pg. 692). And even after that status was acquired, reframing the station's story "as an American story of triumph and diversity, and not just a tragic story about Chinese exclusion and detentions" was critical to the Angel Island Immigration Station Foundation's ability to gather support and raise funds for the site's restoration and preservation (Lee & Yung, pg. 310).

Nonetheless, it is English and Traditional Chinese that are the languages of the station site's bilingual State Park signage (Figure 9). Even the presence of English is a marker of the process of transforming narrative of the immigration station from Chinese or Chinese American to "American". In 1979 a black granite monument (Figure 10), funded by Victor "Trader Vic" Bergeron, founder of the eponymous and once globe-spanning chain of tiki restaurants, was erected in front of the detention barracks. Eight feet tall and weighing three tons, the monument is inscribed with a poem in Traditional Chinese, the winning entry in a contest organized by the Angel Island Immigration Station Historical Advisory Committee and the *Chinese Times* (Lee & Yung, 2010, pg. 306). As originally installed, this verse was deliberately left untranslated, the monument not contextualized for the non-Chinese reader: "a concrete expression of a mute and

guarded personal history" (Hoskins, 2007, pg. 447). Today the monument has its own interpretive panel (Figure 11), outlining the monument's history and giving an English translation. It has also been relocated away from its original prominent location to an overlook at the edge of the site, in line with its categorization by Philip Choy in the second application for National Historic Landmark status as a "non-contributing object"—one that, under the rules of the National Register of Historic Places, "does not add to the historic associations, historic architectural qualities, or archaeological values for which a property is significant" (pg. 448).

Recognized National Significance

Hoskins (2010) identifies two imperatives shaping the narrative of the Immigration Station as a memory site: the narrative must be one that fits pre-existing assumptions about what is "appropriate" for a National Historic Landmark, and it must be one that positions Angel Island as comparable to (and contrastive with) Ellis Island and other immigration-related memory sites of recognized national significance (pg. 261). Both of these imperatives drive toward a simplification of the narrative, a flattening of complexities. The meaning of the past may be ambiguous, as Arlette Farge argues (1989/2013, pg. 94), but the meaning of a National Historic Landmark must be clear and specific. "What Ellis Island symbolizes to Americans of European heritage who immigrated to the east coast," states Choy's successful 1995 application for landmark status, "Angel Island symbolizes to Americans of Asian heritage on the west coast" (pg. 11). In Choy's application, the specific experience of Chinese immigrants, as distinguished from other immigrants from Asia, and even the way in which their treatment illustrates "the racist nature of U.S. immigration policy during that period," is secondary—worth noting "in addition" to the island's primary symbolism, but not in itself a marker of national significance. Significance is reserved for the station's status as "the major west coast processing center for immigrants" during its time of operation, for its role as a POW facility from 1942-1946, and for

its association "with the broad patterns of U.S. history relating to ethnic heritage, politics/ government and military events from which understanding and appreciation of those patterns may be gained"—language taken almost directly from the National Historic Landmark criteria (2022).

Once the official meaning of a National Historic Landmark has been established—once the particular events and "broad national patterns of United States history" ("NHL criteria", 2022) associated with the site have been named—there is no provision in the Code of Federal Regulations for revising that meaning. The narrative of the Angel Island Immigration Station today is bounded by the terms of Choy's application; the story of the station *as* a memory site is outside those boundaries, except insofar as it leads, teleologically, to the restored and preserved site as it exists today. As Hoskins relates, a "noncontributing object" such as the granite monument is incompatible both with the National Park Service's notions of "historic integrity" ("Glossary", n.d.) and with "the manufacture of an inspirational historical experience" (Hoskins, 2007, pg. 449). Visitors are asked to learn about and reflect on the experience of arrivals and detainees during the period of the station's operation, but not to complicate those reflections with questions of the meaning of the site to those detainees in later life, or to their descendants; to remember the station's "significant" and "historic" role, but not to remember how the station came to be forgotten, or, after it was forgotten, what it meant for it to be remembered. The remembering of Angel Island is narrated only obliquely, through installations such as the Immigrant Heritage Wall (Figure 12), which features sponsored plaques (Bashford et al., 2016, pg. 22) honoring immigrant ancestors, and the ubiquitous Immigrant Heritage Benches (Figure 13), sponsored by donors for a renewable period of fifteen years ("Give", n.d.)

"In the Past and Now"

Connections between what happened on Angel Island from 1910 to 1940 and what continues to happen today in federal detention centers, state and county jails, and for-profit prisons are likewise outside the bounds of the Immigration Station's narrative. An exhibit in the renovated station hospital exploring "the impact of divisive laws on individual lives and American culture" touches on undocumented immigration, but the focus is still on immigrant "determination", on "overcoming exclusion and enduring detention"; exclusion laws are described as "divisive" rather than "unjust", and among the figures profiled on the exhibit's website, the most contemporary is an American citizen child born in the United States of undocumented parents in 1989. Hoskins (2005) notes that the celebration of Angel Island's Chinese detainees for their endurance in the face of the Exclusion Act's racism has the effect of diverting attention from the responsibility of the United States for perpetrating that racism (pg. 57); in the same way, the focus here on immigrants' endurance through detention, their ability to succeed despite "divisive" exclusion laws, diverts attention from the injustice of that detention and those laws. Though Lee & Yung in their concluding chapter draw the connections explicitly from Angel Island to today, detailing the massive expansion of immigrant detention and deportation in the twenty-first century—often under conditions no better and laws no more just than those at Angel Island—the bench sponsored by Henry and Priscilla Der "In Honor of All Immigrants Who Have Been Unjustly Detained In the Past and Now" (Figure 14) is one of the few installations at the Immigration Station that comes close to an explicit comment on contemporary immigration politics.

Conclusions

The ongoing campaign to preserve and restore Angel Island Immigration Station and to promote awareness of the history it represents has been in most respects a great success. Where

in 1976 stood gutted, dilapidated structures scheduled for demolition, today stand renovated, brightly painted buildings housing contemporary, well-funded museum exhibits. Where former Angel Island detainees once felt unable to share their experiences even with their children, today those experiences are recorded, documented, recognized officially as of national significance, as an integral part of the story of the United States as a "nation of immigrants"—and recognized, also, as complicating older, simpler narratives of arrival and assimilation, as highlighting the nation's ambivalence toward immigration, its identity not only as a "nation of immigrants" but a "gatekeeping nation" (Lee & Yung, 2010, pg. 324). At the same time, the bringing the story of the Angel Island Immigration Station into the public eye and incorporating it into the country's official national narrative—even into an official national narrative more complex and nuanced than it was before that incorporation—has by necessity simplified that story, at least as told at the station through its role as a memorial site. By figuring as "history" only those events that occurred at the site prior to its abandonment in 1946, the designation of Angel Island as a National Historic Monument disconnects it from the recent past, the ways in which previous generations remembered the site, from the 1979 granite monument to the "apocryphal tales" of suicides and secret messages circulated by State Park–trained guides (Hoskins, 2010, pg. 263).[7]

And the historicization inherent in National Historic Monument status disconnects the site even more sharply from the present. Heritage, as David Lowenthal (1998) reminds us, is not history; but that adage works both ways at Angel Island. While transforming the Immigration Station from a local site to a national one based, in the words of the Historic Sites Act of 1935, on "true historical and archaeological facts" (qtd. in Hoskins, 2010, pg. 263) may have entailed suppressing guides' lurid tales in favor of documentary evidence and "a strict epistemological division between fact and fiction" (pg. 265)—suppressing heritage, in Lowenthal's terms, in favor of history—it also entailed reshaping the narrative of immigration at Angel Island to fit the

preconceived "heritage" notion of the United States as a land of freedom and opportunity: one in which immigrants might endure hardship and injustice, but succeed eventually through determination and perseverance. As long as the memorialization of the Angel Island Immigration Station places that hardship and injustice safely in the past, AIISF president Kathy Lim Ko's vision of the station as "a site of conscience, about immigration past, present, and future" (qtd. Lee & Yung, 2010, pg. 313) will never be fully realized.

References

Angel Island Company. (n.d.). Retrieved December 9, 2022, from https://www.angelisland.com/

Angel Island Immigration Museum. (n.d.). Angel Island Immigration Station Foundation. Retrieved December 21, 2022, from https://www.aiisf.org/aiimexhibit

Bashford, A., Hobbins, P., Clarke, A., & Frederick, U. K. (2016). Geographies of commemoration: Angel Island, San Francisco and North Head, Sydney. *Journal of Historical Geography*, *52*, 16–25. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jhg.2015.12.003

California State Parks. (2018). *Park Brochure, Angel Island State Park*. https://www.parks.ca.gov/pages/468/files/AngelIslandSPFinalWeb070618.pdf

Cannato, V. J. (2009). *American passage: The history of Ellis Island* (1st ed). Harper.

Choy, P. P. (1995). *National Historic Landmark Nomination: U.S. Immigration Station, Angel Island* (S. Kline, Ed.). https://npgallery.nps.gov/NRHP/GetAsset/a29a579c-1873-4802-804f-b3f15d4a30f0

Daniels, R. (1997). No Lamps Were Lit for Them: Angel Island and the Historiography of Asian American Immigration. *Journal of American Ethnic History*, *17*(1), 3–18.

Daniels, R. (2011). Review of Angel Island: Immigrant Gateway to America [Review of *Review of Angel Island: Immigrant Gateway to America*, by E. Lee & J. Yung]. *The Journal of American History*, *98*(2), 546–547.

Davison, M., & Meier, L. (2002). *Cultural Landscape Report for Angel Island Immigration Station: Volume 1: Site History* (Vol. 1). National Park Service, Olmstead Center for

Landscape Preservation. http://npshistory.com/publications/california/clr-angel-is-is-v1.pdf

Egan, C. (2020). *Voices of Angel Island: Inscriptions and Immigrant Poetry, 1910-1945*. Bloomsbury Academic & Professional.

Ellis Island / Angel Island. (n.d.). Angel Island Immigration Museum Virtual Exhibition. Retrieved December 9, 2022, from https://www.aiisf.org/ellis-angel

Farge, A. (2003) The Allure of the Archives (T. Scott-Railton, Trans.). Yale University Press. (Original work published 1989)

Ferry Service From Angel Island to SF May End Due to Declining Sales. (2020, December 19). *NBC Bay Area*. https://www.nbcbayarea.com/news/local/san-francisco/ferry-service-from-angel-island-to-sf-may-end-due-to-declining-sales/2427825/

Ferry: Statistics & Ridership. (2022). Golden Gate Bridge, Highway, and Transportation District. https://www.goldengate.org/ferry/history-research/statistics-ridership/

Give. (n.d.). Angel Island Immigration Station Foundation. Retrieved December 23, 2022, from https://www.aiisf.org/donate

Glossary—National Historic Landmarks. (n.d.). U.S. National Park Service. Retrieved December 23, 2022, from https://www.nps.gov/subjects/nationalhistoriclandmarks/glossary.htm

History of Angel Island Immigration Station. (n.d.). Angel Island Immigration Station Foundation. Retrieved December 21, 2022, from https://www.aiisf.org/history

Hoskins, G. (2005). *Memory and mobility: Representing Chinese exclusion at Angel Island Immigration Station.* [Doctoral dissertation, Aberystwyth University]. https://www.proquest.com/dissertations/docview/301640056/abstract/E4B4148909EF4131PQ/1

Hoskins, G. (2007). Materialising Memory at Angel Island Immigration Station, San Francisco. *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space*, *39*(2), 437–455. https://doi.org/10.1068/a38174

Hoskins, G. (2010). A secret reservoir of values: The narrative economy of Angel Island Immigration Station. *Cultural Geographies*, *17*(2), 259–275. https://doi.org/10.1177/1474474010363850

In the Shadows. (n.d.). Angel Island Immigration Museum Virtual Exhibition. Retrieved December 23, 2022, from https://www.aiisf.org/aiimintheshadows

Lai, H. M. (1976). The Chinese Experience at Angel Island, Part III: Literature of Exclusion and Detention. *East/West: The Chinese American Journal*, *10*(9), 1–2. The Him Mark Lai Digital Archive.

Lee, E. (2003). *At America's Gates: Chinese Immigration during the Exclusion Era, 1882-1943*. The University of North Carolina Press.

Lee, E., & Yung, J. (2010). *Angel Island: Immigrant gateway to America*. Oxford University Press.

Lenn, E. (1949, April 25). 15,000 Delighted With Angel Island; 10,000 Miss Tour. *San Francisco Examiner*.

Lowenthal, D. (1998). Fabricating Heritage. *History and Memory*, *10*(1), 5–24.

National Historic Landmark criteria, 36 CFR § 65.4. (2022). Retrieved December 22, 2022, from https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-36/chapter-I/part-65/section-65.4

National Immigration Museum. (n.d.). *Statue of Liberty & Ellis Island.* Retrieved December 21, 2022, from https://www.statueofliberty.org/ellis-island/national-immigration-museum/

New Immigration Station Abandoned. (1909, February 21). *San Francisco Examiner*, 56.

Pegler-Gordon, A. (2021). *Closing the Golden Door: Asian Migration and the Hidden History of Exclusion at Ellis Island*. The University of North Carolina Press.

Quarantine Station. (n.d.). Angel Island Conservancy. Retrieved December 9, 2022, from https://angelisland.org/history/quarantine-station/

Wheeler, T. (n.d.). *Historical Landscapes of the Angel Island Coastal Fortifications*. California Department of Parks and Recreation. Retrieved December 9, 2022, from https://www.parks.ca.gov/?page_id=23084

Notes

[1] The exact number may never be known, as the Immigration Station's own records were destroyed by fire in 1940, and other records were only incompletely retained (Lee & Yung, 2010, pp. 17-18). The figure of 500,000 "processed, detained, and/or interrogated" is given by the AIISF website. Lee & Yung suggest a more conservative estimate of 300,000 detained.

[2] Reviewer Daniels (2011) calls it "the first history [of the station] worth its name".

[3] Japanese and Korean immigration was not blocked by statute until 1924; the so-called "Gentlemen's Agreement" of 1907 between the U.S. and Japan restricted emigration of laborers from Japan and Japanese-occupied Korea, but allowed the entry of women and dependents (Lee & Yung, 2010, pp. 7, 116; Pegler-Gordon, 2021, pg. 34). National-level figures collected by Lee & Yung suggest that Chinese and Koreans were debarred from entry at a similar rate (as were Russians and Mexicans, among others), while the rate of rejection for Japanese was substantially lower, perhaps because more were women and children. Indian arrivals were debarred at by far the highest rate, more than five times that for Chinese, but represented a relatively small fraction of the traffic through the station.

[4] Lee & Yung document the cases of Quok Shee, who was detained for twenty-three months before she was finally admitted (pg. 57), and Lee Puey You, who was detained for twenty months before the Supreme Court rejected her final appeal (pg. 93); Lai et al. identify the holder of the record for longest detention as one Kong Din Quong, detained for 756 days before he was deported (pp. 21-22).

[5] The Angel Island Association (AIA) has since renamed itself the Angel Island Conservancy, and along with the Angel Island Immigration Station Foundation (AIISF), is one of two "Cooperating Associations" associated with Angel Island State Park as part of a statute-authorized program partnering nonprofit charitable organizations with the California Department of Parks and Recreation to fund "educational and interpretive needs that are impossible for state parks to meet" ("Cooperating Associations Program", n.d.). Hoskins (2005) documents how the AIA was left out of the agreements between the State of California, the National Park Service, and the AIISF that govern the operation of the Immigration Station site, even though through Hoskins' time on the island it had been AIA volunteers that guided visitor tours there (pp. 17-19).

[6] The eucalyptus trees are themselves immigrants of a sort, or rather transportees, imported by the U.S. military after the destruction of the island's original timber cover through over-harvesting in the mid-19th century (Wheeler, n.d.).

[7] Hoskins (2010) documents how guidance for docents written in 2002 in discouraged these stories for lack of documentary evidence (pg. 265), but is interesting to note that Lee & Yung (2010) corroborate some with oral testimony, and in one case with a contemporary newspaper account (pg. 101).

Figures

Figure 1

Angel Island Immigration Station as seen from the deck of the ferry

Note. Due to the angle of the sun, this was the best photo of the Immigration Station I was able to take from the water. The building in the foreground is the Central Heating Plant; just to its left, where the wharf once terminated, is the Fog Bell. Farther to the left, one corner of the Detention Barracks is just visible above the rocks and brush.

Figure 2

Map of Angel Island State Park

Note. Extracted from 2018 California State Parks brochure. The "Ferry to San Francisco" route indicates the Blue & Gold Fleet service to Fisherman's Wharf that ended in 2021; the Golden Gate Ferry service from the Ferry Building approaches Ayala Cove from the east.

Figure 3

Angel Island State Park Visitor Center

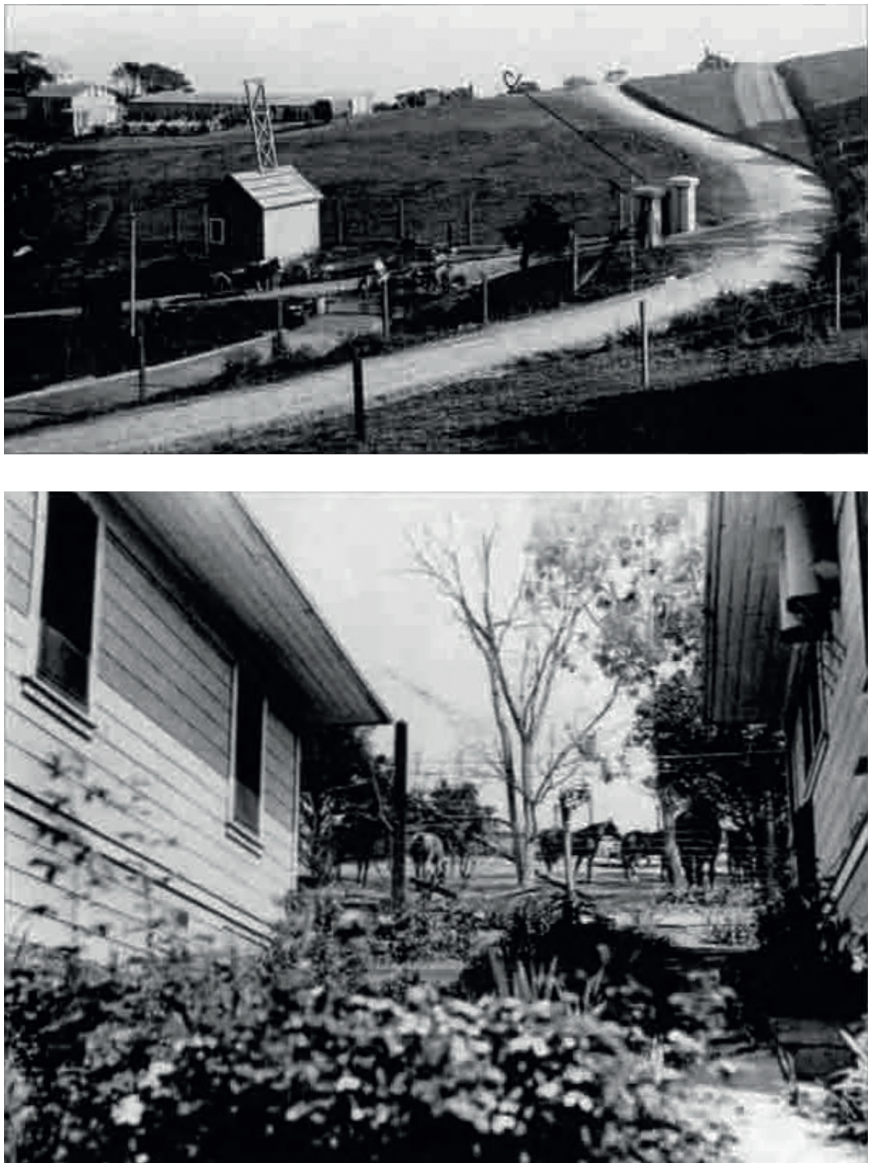
Figure 4

"Poetry on Wooden Walls", State Park Visitor Center

Note. The explanatory text referring to "Asian immigrants" erases the specificity of the Chinese Exclusion Act and the differential treatment of groups from different Asian countries, while "held for lengthy interrogations" hides the complexity of the denial / appeal process.

Figure 5

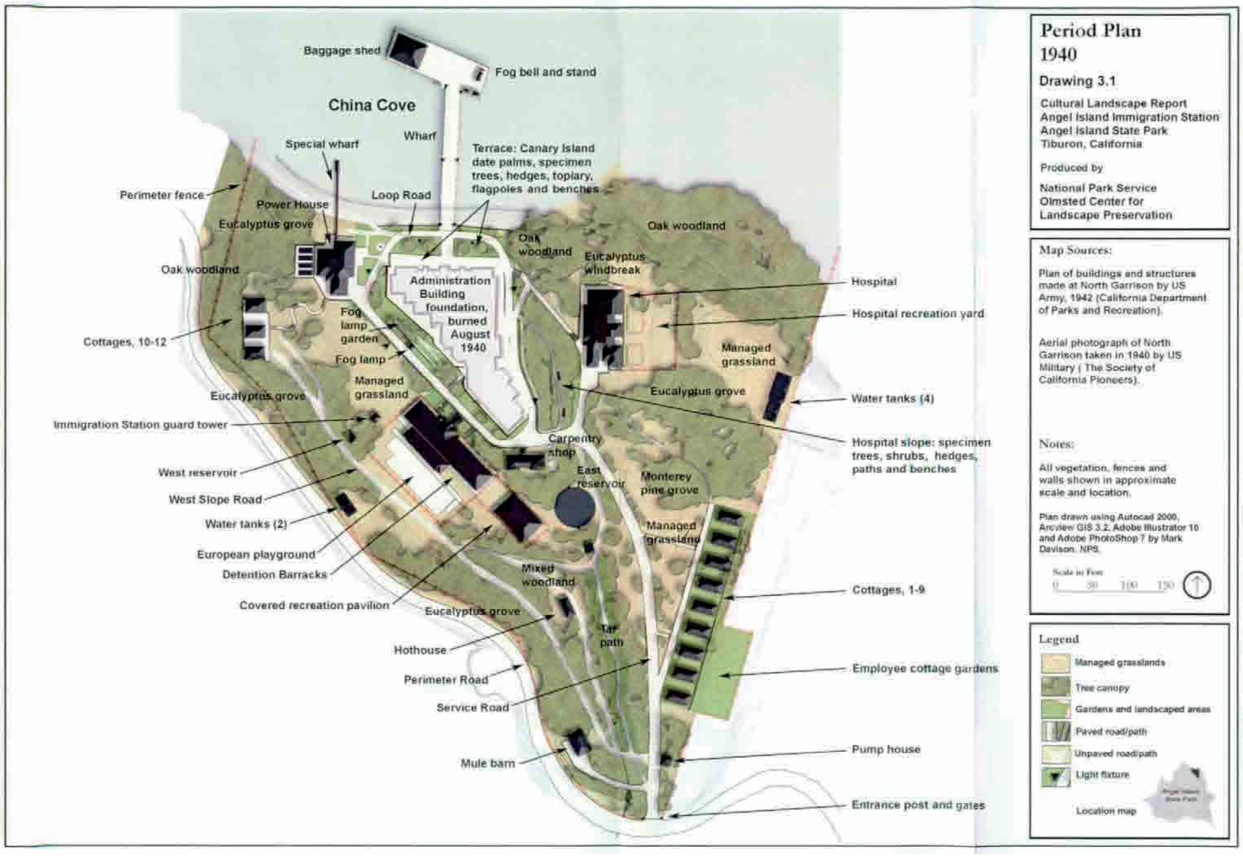
Fences visible in photographs of the Immigration Station entrance in 1910 (top) and of the employee cottages in 1940 (bottom)



Note. Photos taken from NPS Cultural Landscape Report (Davison & Meier, 2002, pp. 74 [top] and 104 [bottom]). The only digitized copy of the report I was able to locate was this low-resolution JPEG scan.

Figure 6

Plan of Immigration Station site as it existed in 1940, as prepared in 2002 for NPS Cultural Landscape Report, showing approximate fence locations



Note. Drawing taken from Davison & Meier, 2002, pp. 99-100.

Figure 7

Interpretive panel, "US Immigration Station: Fencing Out Freedom"

Figure 8

National Park Service plaque certifying the Immigration Station's status as a National Historic Landmark

Figure 9

Bilingual signage near the Immigration Station entrance

Note. In much of California, bilingual signage might be is in Spanish; here it is in Chinese. The fact that it is in Traditional, not Simplified Chinese suggests the intended audience: not tourists from the People's Republic of China, but detainees and their descendants.

Figure 10

1979 granite monument funded by Victor "Trader Vic" Bergeron, in its new location

Figure 11

Interpretive panel for the 1979 monument

Note. The panel identifies the author of the poem as Eddie Ngoot Ping Chin, and gives the following translation:

> 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.

Figure 12

Immigrant Heritage Wall

Figure 13

Chen Family Immigrant Heritage Bench honoring HC & Susan Chien

Figure 14

Immigrant Heritage Bench sponsored by Henry and Priscilla Der "In Honor of All Immigrants Who Have Been Unjustly Detained In the Past and Now"

Appendix: Timeline

1882	U.S. Congress passes 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act
1910	Angel Island Immigration Station opened
1924	1924 Immigration Act bars all aliens "ineligible to citizenship"
1940	main administration building destroyed by fire; detainees transferred to mainland
1941	Immigration Station site reverts to U.S. Army
1970	ranger Alexander Weiss brings poems to attention of Asian American activists
1974	Angel Island Immigration Station Historical Advisory Committee (AIISHAC) founded
1976	California appropriates $250,000 to repair detention building and preserve poems
1979	dedication of granite monument funded by Victor "Trader Vic" Bergeron
1983	interpretive center opens; Angel Island Immigration Station Foundation (AIISF) founded
1993	"Gateway to Gold Mountain" traveling exhibit
1994	first application for National Historic Landmark status rejected
1997	second application for National Historic Landmark status approved
2000	AIISF receives $500,000 grant from National Trust for Historic Preservation; California approves $400,000 appropriation, $15 million bond
2003	California State Parks approves master plan for restoration
2005	U.S. Congress passes Angel Island Immigration Station Restoration and Preservation Act, authorizing $15 million in Federal funds
2009	Restored immigration station reopens
2010	President Barack Obama proclaims Jan. 21, 2010 "National Angel Island Day"

Sources: Egan (2020), Frierson (2022), Hoskins (2005), Lai (1976), Lee & Yung (2010)