

# Congregational Ministry & Advocacy

THE ANGEL ISLAND IMMIGRATION STATION ERA 1910-1940



*Remembering the religious communities that served, and advocated for, the detainees of Angel Island, and how they speak to us today.*



A publication of  
PILGRIMAGE TO ANGEL ISLAND 2010  
Whispers of the Past to the Cries for Justice Today  
September 25, 2010

# Preface

In the spring of 2010, a group of clergy and lay leaders of Chinese ancestry came together to plan a pilgrimage to Angel Island in commemoration of the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its opening. Many of us had family connections to Angel Island, but knew little more than that our parents or grandparents were there at some time in their life. It was rarely something they liked to talk about. Thus, an early goal was to gather the Chinese community to recall the stories that were at risk of being forgotten, and to find healing and a deeper understanding.

In the process of planning this event, two other goals emerged. Firstly, we discovered striking parallels between the policies and discourse on immigration then and now and wanted to bring the similarities and connections to light. A hundred years ago, California and San Francisco was the focal point of the national immigration debate. Angel Island was built in 1910 in the middle of the San Francisco Bay to detain and control unwanted immigrants and laborers. At the time, the face of these unwanted immigrants was predominantly Chinese (then later Japanese, and other Asians).

Today the focal point for our nation's immigration issue is the US-Mexico border. The public face of unwanted immigrants and laborers is largely Mexican and Latin American. Just as Angel Island was constructed to restrict Chinese immigration a hundred years ago, our government today is spending nearly \$1.7 billion annually to keep out unwanted immigrants coming across the Southern border. Last year, nearly 380,000 immigrants were deported, exceeding the total number that were detained during Angel Island's 30 years of operation. Like our Chinese ancestors, immigrants today are facing exclusionist laws, workplace exploitation, enforcement sweeps, family separations, long detentions and the constant fear of being deported.

Our second discovery was far more hopeful, for we uncovered forgotten stories of congregations and religious leaders who, during the Chinese Exclusion era, ministered to immigrants who were being held on the island. They sought to improve their living conditions, advocated for their release, and fought for reform of unjust policies. Recalling these stories\* kindles our spirits to be faithful, and provokes us to ask ourselves: How are we to respond today?

We give thanks to all of those who contributed to the pilgrimage planning process and the contents of this book: Laurene Chan, Emma Chiang, Larry Chin, Alton Chinn, Lauren Chinn, Dale Ching, Buddy Choy, Doreen Der-McCleod, Casey Dexter-Lee, Rev. Norman Fong, Fr. Franklin Fong, Julie Gilgoff, Sharlene Hall, Bill Ong Hing, Rev. Vincent Jang, Greg Jue, Yvette Jimenez-Mota, Mary Fong Ko, Rev. Franco Kwan, Albert Lee, Brian Lee, Derek Lee, Erika Lee, Gordon Lee, Mary Leong, Larry Lew, Fr. Dan McCotter, Macrina Mota, Shirlene Leong Nakano, Sam Louie, Rev. Don Ng, Diana Rashid, Maria Sakovich, Justin Talbott, Eva Steligmann-Kennard, Anna Wong, Jeremy Wong, Eddie Wong, and Judy Young. A special thanks to Grace Urban Ministries for assisting in the conceptual development, editing and production of this publication. \*The stories included in this book represent only the beginning. Many more, such as the story of the Paulist Catholic Fathers of St. Mary's Church and the Stockton Sikh Gurdwara are forthcoming.

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# Introduction

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We as a people tend to distance ourselves from our past. As a result, whether preoccupied by the here-and-now or allured by the hope of “progress,” we relinquish the essential benefit of history as a lens through which to interpret, let alone recognize, the features and contours of the present and tumultuous socio-political landscape. Such is the case with Angel Island, the location of the American West’s first major immigration detention facility, from 1910-1940. With the exception of small minority of Americans, the island’s rich yet egregious legacy of human struggle for thousands of Chinese and other immigrants has been all but reduced to, at best, a cursory knowledge among those who perhaps visited the historic site on a school field trip, or read about it in history book or newspaper article.

And while several books have been written on the experience of the thousands of detainees who endured the crowded living quarters, the over-bearing interrogations, the lack of quality food and health care, and the continual fear of deportation back to a life-threatening existence, much less has been documented about the role of congregations and religious institutions in providing hope, physical care and, in many cases, the realization of entrance into the country to begin a new American life. For Angel Island’s myriad stories of faith, the book has yet to be written.

This publication represents a small, humble beginning to such an endeavor. In the short essays that follow, you will glimpse the work of many congregations (and the individuals they commissioned) that boldly extended care and dignity to many despised immigrants, particularly the Chinese for whom a proliferation of harsh laws were enacted to thwart their presence. Following these stories is a timeline of select (i.e. non-comprehensive) anti-Chinese immigrant measures, placed side-by-side with present-day immigration policies that mirror them, in spirit if not in letter. The final pages are dedicated to ways that congregations today can follow in the footsteps of those who went before us.



## PRESBYTERIAN MISSION: Ms. Donaldina Cameron

# A Witness of Character

*"They are witnesses to the good character of her alleged husband, and her landing is recommended,"* wrote the immigration inspector, referring to Miss Donaldina Cameron who served as a character witness for many Chinese immigrants in the early 1900s as a ministry of the Presbyterian Mission in Chinatown. With this final letter of recommendation, addressed to the U.S. Immigration Commissioner on March 2, 1917, my grandmother, Wong Shee, was granted release from the Angel Island Immigration Station, located a few miles off the shore of San Francisco, where she'd been detained for four long months.



Vouching for the integrity of my grandfather, Fong Lung, and verifying his status as a merchant (one of the few avenues back then for a Chinese man to enter the country or be joined by his wife), was but one way that these Presbyterians advocated for my grandmother during her island captivity. In another letter (along with a \$300 deposit) written on November 10th, 1916, Donaldina made a plea to the immigration authorities for hospital treatment for my grandmother's trachoma, an eye disease that if left uncured, would have guaranteed her deportation back to China...and to an abusive mother-in-law she was desperate to avoid, even if it meant taking her own life.

Thanks to the church's generosity, and persistent correspondence with both the medical officers and the acting commissioners, Wong Shee received the needed medications and time to eventually receive a clean bill of health. Their labor of love enabled my grandmother to finally "land" in San Francisco, marking the beginning of a new life in America. Thirteen years later, she and her husband gave birth to my mother, Pearl Fong, in Oakland, California. Thus, my family's life in America is tied to these Presbyterians who, nearly a century ago, served my ancestors in Christ's name. For their longsuffering ministry, I will always be grateful to God.

*By Craig Wong. Mr. Wong is a member of Grace Fellowship Community Church, a Cumberland Presbyterian congregation in San Francisco's Mission District, and the executive director of Grace Urban Ministries ([www.gum.org](http://www.gum.org)), a church-based non-profit serving vulnerable children, youth and families in the city.*

## EXCLUSION

By the 1870s, amidst a post-Gold Rush slump, the Chinese were despised by many who blamed "coolies" for depressed wage levels. Political pressure resulted in the passing of the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882, a law that prohibited virtually all Chinese from entering the United States. One exception were merchants, many of whom set up shop in San Francisco's Chinatown. One of the key tasks of immigration advocates, which included



many congregations and mission organizations, was to serve as non-Chinese (i.e. Anglo) witnesses to the legitimacy and character of those claiming to be merchants, or wives of merchants, to the satisfaction of the U.S. immigration authorities.

Today, under very similar economic circumstances (with Latino immigrants as the primary economic scapegoat), tens of thousands of immigrants are being detained or deported every year. However, because of the privatization of detainment facilities, combined with sheer numbers and inconsistent, inadequate, or misapplied detainee-access rights and policies, it has become increasingly difficult to advocate for, let alone locate, those who have been swept up during immigration raids or other enforcement actions.

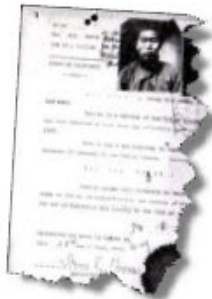
## DOCUMENTATION

Because of immigration laws excluding Chinese (1882-1943), many found ways to circumvent exclusion as paper sons, paper daughters, or paper wives claiming false family relationships and entire new names and identities. Both former detainees and immigration officials estimated that 90 percent of all Chinese had false papers during the Exclusion period.

"We didn't want to come in illegally, but we were forced to because of the immigration laws. They particularly picked on the Chinese. If we told the truth, it didn't work.

So we had to take the crooked path."  
Mr. Chan: former detainee, quoted in *Angel Island* (Lee and Yung, 2010).

Today, US immigration law still is exclusionary to many, particularly based on class. Each year there are a total of only 5,000 unskilled labor visas available. Many, with few options to be reunited with family or to support their families economically, enter the country without legal documentation or overstay their visas. There are an estimated 12 million undocumented in the country today, 1.5 million who are Asian and Pacific Islander. In the University of California system, Asian undocumented youth make up 44% of the undocumented undergraduate population, the largest being Korean, Chinese and Filipino.



## CUMBERLAND PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH: Ms. Julia McCaslin

# Giving Immigrants the Gift of English

On November 19, 1912, my father arrived at Angel Island aboard the S.S. Mongolia, having sailed to America from Shanghai, China. Like many young men then, at the age of 18, my father became a "paper son" so he could come to America. His "paper father" was Choy Tim How, a merchant in San Francisco's Chinatown who bought and sold dry goods at the Hing Chong & Company on Stockton Street. He had to buy these false papers because, at that time, the Chinese Exclusion Act was enforced and he could only come as a minor child of a domiciled merchant. So, from this day forward, my father was known as Choy Fong, or Fong Choy as it is recorded on his ID card issued under the Alien Registration Act of 1940.



Ms. Julia McCaslin

Choy Fong became a salesman and a bookkeeper at his "paper" father's store. During the first eight years of my father's life in America, he managed to learn some English. The immigration records reflect this for, when he returned to China in 1920 to marry my mother, they stated that "he spoke and understood some English" and that he began signing his name in beautiful English penmanship. The question is, where did Choy Fong learn his English?

Some years ago, one of my cousins was browsing through the historical records and photos at the Chinese Cumberland Presbyterian Church, whose ministries were shaped by Ms. Julia McCaslin, a Cumberland Presbyterian missionary teacher. There, my cousin discovered a photo of my father, indicating that he had attended this church in the early days of his immigration to America, and likely learned his first words of English in one of Ms. McCaslin's many classes, a congregational ministry that would serve hundreds of newly arrived immigrants.

*By Buddy Tate Choy. Mr. Choy, the grandson of Choy Fong, is a member of Old First Presbyterian Church in San Francisco.*

## Pastoring People...Condemning Exclusion

Father Daniel Wu was one of the few non-governmental Chinese allowed to visit Angel Island where he served as a translator and counsel to the detainees. Occasionally when someone was released; Daniel would help with their resettlement in San Francisco. Daniel spoke to his own children of the despair he witnessed there; of suicide notes written on cell walls. Self educated, Daniel was ordained as an Episcopal priest in 1912, and went on to pastor the True Sunshine Episcopal Church in Chinatown.



Kidnapped in Shanghai in the late 1880s, 5-year-old Ng Ping (Wu's Chinese name) was later brought to Canton where he served the headmaster of an upper class school. Hungry to learn, he sat outside the classroom by day, and snuck in at night. Using fireflies in a jar for light, he taught himself to read and write.

As a teenager he was brought to Honolulu to work on Hawai'i's plantations. He soon joined with local Confucianists and preached against Christianity on Chinatown's street corners. In 1902 he made a deal with an Episcopal missionary Deaconess by the name of Emma Drant. In exchange for English, he taught her Chinese. Drant had founded Honolulu's St. Elizabeth's mission where Daniel eventually converted to Christianity, suffering the wrath of his Confucian comrades. He soon became one of the mission's student leaders. There, he co-founded the "Quon Hock Society" which met weekly to discuss culture, politics and science.

The *Pacific Commercial Advertiser* (July 3, 1905) reports a speech against the Chinese Exclusion Act that Daniel presented at a large meeting of Chinese: "After we have done so much," he said, "to open up the mineral wealth of America, and to develop the resources of the country, how unjust it is to cast us out...When these people get their passports, pass their medical examination, have their clothes disinfected, and take the steamer to the United States, they are turned back. Is this justice?"

*By Greg Jue. Mr. Jue is the grandson of Rev. Daniel Wu and currently lives in Chicago, IL.*

### ADVOCACY

By 1853, just a few short years after gold was struck, the hard-working Chinese numbered over 25,000 in California, raising the ire of their Caucasian neighbors as they saw their wages and wealth threatened. The year prior, a "foreign miners tax" had been imposed, followed by an additional \$50 head tax, on all Chinese in the state. To make things worse, anti-Chinese riots broke out in San Francisco.

Meanwhile, a Rev. Dr. William Speer arrived in San Francisco from China where he had served as a medical missionary. With a working knowledge of Cantonese and a call from the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions, he founded and organized the Presbyterian Mission as well as a dispensary that would become the Chinese Hospital. Incensed about the way the Chinese were being



mistreated, Dr. Speer led the charge to advocate for them, making a forceful argument before the California State legislature, and the public at large, to repeal the unjust taxes being levied.

The faith community has continued to play a key role in walking with immigrant communities. Notable events in the last 50 years, include the farm worker struggle, refugee resettlement in the 70s, 80s, and 90s, the Sanctuary Movement, and current day efforts to protect immigrant rights and advocacy for fair and just immigration reform.

## PERSECUTION

Jews, fleeing persecution, revolution and the horror of Nazi Germany arrived in the United States via Angel Island hoping to begin a new life. In the 1930s, during depression time in the US - much as the difficult economic times today -



the authorities did not want to accept more refugees or immigrants, and people were “profiled” for their status or class, literacy and politics.

Often penniless and without family in America, complete strangers, as well as Jewish organizations came to their rescue. The Jewish commandment and tradition of welcoming the stranger, is a deeply-held value that we as a people must always be conscious of and practice whenever we see injustice.

## HEBREW IMMIGRANT AID SOCIETY & NAT'L COUNCIL OF JEWISH WOMEN

# Help for Those on a Perilous Journey

Angel Island is best known for its status as an immigration and interrogation center for Chinese coming to the United States. It is less well-known that there were other immigrants from countries such as Mexico, Korea, Austria, Germany, Poland and others that passed through Angel Island. In the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, from about 1910 to 1917 a number of Jews fleeing discrimination by the Czarist regime, as well as the Bolshevik revolution arrived at Angel Island. US authorities - often paranoid -suspected them of espionage and radicalism held them for a long period of time. During the 1930s and early 1940s Jews fled from Germany, Poland, Austria and other European countries as a result of the horrors of the Nazi regime.



What stands out from recorded stories of the journeys of these Jews, was, the many ways in which others, often complete strangers, assisted them on their perilous journeys, as well as upon arrival at Angel Island. In particular, the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS) and the National Council of Jewish Women (NCJW) came to the rescue of those Jews deemed by the immigration authorities likely to become a burden to society. Mr. Traube and Mr. Blackman (HIAS), and Ms. Margot Swan (NCJW), Rabbi Stephen Weiss, businessman Lucius Solomon, and others, wrote appeals as a response to denials of entry, vouched for the good character of the immigrants, paid bonds, offered jobs and provided living quarters, so the new arrivals would not be turned back, even as they were penniless. If not for these generous organizations and individuals many an immigrant Jews would have been sent back to a near certain death.

When asked what most important message they wanted to pass on to future generations, these refugees invariably agreed with Leisel Aron (Schiff), immigrant and refugee Jew, who said, “Be tolerant of other people, other groups of people. Look at the individual and see how alike we are.” And in the words of Stan Felson, another Angel Island immigrant: “Do anything you can to help other people.”

*By Eva Seligman-Kennard. Ms. Seligman-Kennard, an immigrant herself, is the current Chair of the North Bay region of the Jewish Community Relations Council of San Francisco, the Peninsula, the East Bay, and Marin and Sonoma counties. Eva has been an activist and advocate for human rights, equality, justice and fairness for all, for most of her adult life.*



## UNITED METHODIST CHURCH: The Rev. Edwar Lee

# Government Worker, Compassionate Servant

*I used to think that it was easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye than for a Chinaman to pass through the Golden Gate* - Rev. Edwar Lee, U.S. Immigration Interpreter

In 1927, Rev. Edwar Lee, a Chinese-American native of San Francisco, then a recent college graduate and young pastor\*, was employed as an interpreter at Angel Island, translating between Chinese applicants and government inspectors during days-long, rigorous hearings and interrogations. As an interpreter, Lee learned to speak several Southern Chinese dialects. His 12 years of work at Angel Island deepened his empathy and compassion for the experiences of immigrants coming from China. Beyond "government work," he saw his vocation as "service for the immigrants," gaining great respect by families he helped re-unite.



My family was one such family; both of my parents came through Angel Island, although at separate times. In 1913, as a teenager, my father, Leong Dai Jeong, left his village with legal documents (albeit false) identifying him as the legal son of his fifth uncle who was a US citizen living in Watsonville, California. My father studied English but didn't have the opportunity to go to college and, therefore, worked many labor-intensive jobs: fruit processor, waiter, railway bartender, naval ship fitter, and elevator operator.

Sixteen years after his initial arrival in the United States, my father returned to China to marry my mother, Fong Shook Mon, whose emigration to the US should have been easy as the wife of a US citizen. However, my father found out that the immigration slot belonging to her had been sold. It took my father nine long years to gather all the resources for my mother's eventual journey to the US. In order to join her husband, my mother had to assume the identity of a woman married to another US citizen. For my mother, who strived to be a responsible and honest person her whole life, the interrogations were extremely difficult. She never spoke openly about these experiences, and they remained a dark cloud for her, for her entire life.

*By Shirlene Leong Nakano. Ms. Nakano is a retired principal of the SF Unified School District, is a member of the First Chinese Baptist Church in San Francisco's Chinatown. \*Rev. Edwar Lee eventually served as the pastor of Chinese Community United Methodist Church in Oakland from 1938-70.*

## INTERROGATION

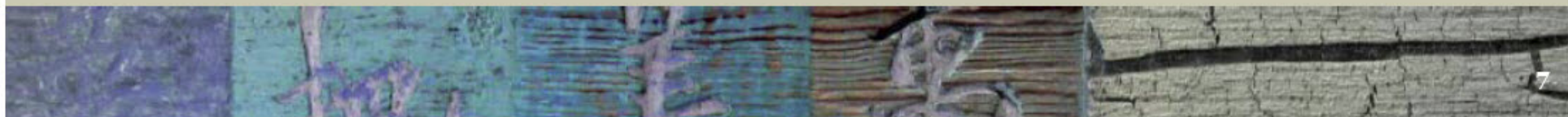
Chinese applicants, including children, had to undergo lengthy and detailed interrogations, a procedure applied only to Chinese who were forced to prove they were who they said they were. Interrogations would sometimes last two to three days as authorities scrutinized and sought to ferret out discrepancies. Interrogations often included hundreds of questions including minute details regarding family members and their village such as: Who is the oldest man in the village? How many steps to the front door? Real family members could easily fail.

Once interrogators were satisfied, the last requirement for release was the testimony of two white witnesses to vouch for their identities.



Today, those facing detention and deportation include families, both undocumented and documented immigrants, many who have been in the US for years. They include asylum seekers, pregnant women, children and adults, some of whom have taken ill without proper medication or care. About half of all immigrants held in detention have no criminal record at all. Others have committed some crime in their past, but although they have already served sentences, they are being detained for immigration purposes only.

Today, immigrants undergoing and trying to fight deportation and removal proceedings also go through detailed hearings. A faith-communities' presence in these courtrooms does make a difference for the families and, often, in the outcome of proceedings.



## QUOTAS

The 1924 Quota Act, effectively restricted all immigration from Asia. Even after Chinese exclusion laws were repealed in 1943, only 105 Chinese were allowed to immigrate per year. In 1946, 100 people were allowed per year from the Philippines and India. It was not until the 1965 Immigration and Naturalization Act that immigration policies that had previously favored Northern and Western Europeans were equalized. Asian countries were now on an equal footing for the first time in U.S. History.



Despite this, in 1990 immigration laws were amended to include more "diversity" visas for immigrants from countries that have not immigrated much since 1965. Immigrants from countries of western Europe benefit greatly, but not Chinese, Filipinos, Koreans, and Indians, even though Asians are still less than 3% of the US population at the time (because of the vestiges of Asian exclusion laws).

Anti-immigrant groups such as the Federation of Americans for Immigration Reform (FAIR) constantly call for a great reduction in *legal* immigration to the United States.

## RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH: Father Vladimir Sakovich

# Priestly Help, Hope and Reassurance

Refugees from the Bolshevik revolution and ensuing civil war began arriving in San Francisco in 1920. The numbers peaked in 1923-24. Although the Quota Act of 1924 greatly reduced the possibility of coming to the United States, homeless and stateless former citizens of Russia continued to come until the U.S. joined the war in late 1941. Until his death in 1931, Father Vladimir Sakovich, rector at the Russian Orthodox Holy Trinity Cathedral, met many of these refugees at the pier in San Francisco and ministered to those who spent time at the Angel Island Immigration Station.



A refugee physician remembered: "You could immediately spot the figure of Father Vladimir among all those gathered at the wharf even though out of church he usually wore civilian dress. His stately, imposing carriage, his kind face and affable smile stood out from all the rest of the crowd. Being a priest, he was permitted to visit ... those on the ship before they were sent to Angel Island. He took advantage of this short time to quickly explain all the formalities, to give advice, find out about special needs and how to help them."

His visits were not limited to the ship. Throughout these years he made the trip to Angel Island to offer help, hope and reassurance. Probably most memorable, to immigration officials, at least, was the prayer service on August 18, 1923 which he conducted in the Administration Building with the help of a choir formed by some of the student detainees. As recalled later, the help of Father Sakovich was "precious for us all; these moments were never-to-be forgotten."

*By Maria Sakovich. Public historian and independent scholar, Ms. Sakovich researches, writes, and develops exhibits in the areas of immigration, family, and community history. Her own family history has motivated her to explore the non-Asian experience at the Angel Island Immigration Station, the lives of two Methodist women in history, and currently the experience of the Russian refugees who arrived in the San Francisco Bay Area in the 1920s, the subject of her next book.*

## “Kuan Yin” for Those in Detainment

During her long career at Angel Island, Deaconess Katharine Maurer acquired a legendary reputation. Known variously as “Missy Ma-lo,” “ABC Mama,” the “Angel of Angel Island,” and even as Kuan Yin (the Goddess of Mercy), the San Francisco directory listed her occupation over time as deaconess, missionary, evangelist, and social worker, all appropriate descriptions for the work she performed. Her contacts in Chinatown were numerous enough to warrant a business card with her name both in English and Chinese. Families honored Maurer by naming their daughters after her. But people of all backgrounds appreciated her service and responded to her extraordinary ability to connect with them.



As chief welfare worker this Methodist deaconess strived to make the period of detention as comfortable as possible, physically, psychologically, and even spiritually. She supplied basic needs and offered support and counsel. Her therapeutic skills, acquired when the social work profession was new, and enhanced through her years of experience, would still be effective today. Many personal letters and poems of thanks attest to deep gratitude for her “goodness and kindness ... to many brokenhearted people.”

While the deaconess actively shared her faith among a captive audience at the federally-operated immigration station, she also preached and modeled a message of love, respect, and tolerance. In the national atmosphere of anti-immigrant feelings and amid the more local anti-Asian sentiments that pervaded her working years, Maurer offered a different vision of human relationships. She believed in the inherent equality of people. “I am glad,” she remarked, “I was taught as a child to love all people and God has given me reason to have faith in my fellow man, irrespective of nationality or creed.” In her work as a “missionary among immigrants” Maurer drew on her own immigrant background and her commitment as a deaconess to those in need.

*By Maria Sakovich. A public historian and independent scholar, Ms. Sakovich researches, writes, and develops exhibits in the areas of immigration, family, and community history. Her own family history has motivated her to explore the non-Asian experience at the Angel Island Immigration Station, the lives of two Methodist women in history, and currently the experience of the Russian refugees who arrived in the San Francisco Bay Area in the 1920s, the subject of her next book.*

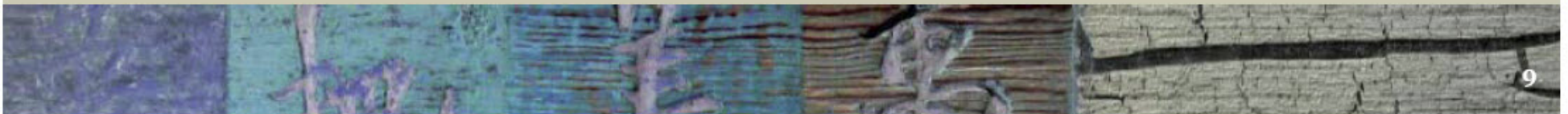
### LIFE IN DETENTION

For Angel Island residents, life in detention was “like being in jail.” Complaints included poor food quality, crowded conditions. Visitors were banned for those awaiting a judgment because authorities feared that coaching information would be smuggled. In 1925, there was a food riot, federal soldiers were called in and detainees refused to eat for 3 days.



In 1922, Chinese men in detention formed a Zizhahui (self-governing organization) called the Angel Island Liberty Association. The association helped to welcome new arrivals, organized life in the barracks, relayed complaints and requests, arbitrated arguments, negotiated with officials over basic living conditions, and set up a Chinese school for detained children, teaching literacy and math. Membership dues paid for books and recreational equipment.

Today the federal government planned family detention centers that would house as many as 600 men, women and children fighting deportation cases. Advocates consider family detention facilities punitive and unnecessary.



## LIFE BEYOND THE ISLAND

After leaving Angel Island, the Chinese immigrants still faced possibility of arrest and deportation. There were raids in neighborhoods, schools and churches. Chinese were considered suspicious and those who came under false papers lived in the shadows, with fears of harassment and threats to their personal safety. The Chinese community complained about the "veritable reign of terror" created by law enforcement and immigration authorities.

Today, certain immigrant communities still live under this "veritable reign of terror." Muslim, Arab and South Asian immigrant communities live under surveillance and constant suspicion. Latino immigrant communities live in fear of raids, automobile checkpoints, being pulled-over by police and, ultimately, deportation.



Then and now, faith communities were one of the few institutions that existed in immigrant communities. Today, as in the past, they serve a vital role in providing information and networking for jobs, housing, language skills, and other basic services to immigrants.

## PRESBYTERIAN MISSION: Ms. Tien Fuk Wu & Ms. Mae Wong

# Rescued to Rescue Others

During the Angel Island era, two Chinese women, Ms. Tien Fuk Wu & Ms. Mae Wong, served the needs of immigrants who were allowed beyond the gates of Angel Island and dedicated their lives "for the benefit of Chinatown." Both were rescued as young girls from abusive situations by Ms. Donaldina Cameron and then educated. They then spent the rest of their lives as Presbyterian mission workers, and active members of the Presbyterian Church in Chinatown.



Tien Fuk Wu

Mae Wong

Ms. Wu was born in China and sold by her father to settle a gambling debt when she was five years old. Ms. Wu was brought to San Francisco as a "mooie jai," (a young servant girl until old enough to serve as a prostitute) by an abusive owner. In 1894, when she was nine years old, staff of the Presbyterian Mission Home (now Cameron House) and Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children rescued her and brought her to live in the Mission Home.

Ms. Wu grew up and served as interpreter to Ms. Cameron, helping her on raids and rescue missions eventually becoming the Assistant Superintendent of the Mission Home, the first Asian American domestic violence center in the US. She helped to speak about the work, raise funds and worked with the Chinatown community to address intergenerational issues between Chinese parents and their children raised in Western culture.

Ms. Wong was rescued in 1922 by Ms. Cameron and Ms. Wu. She worked most of her life as a staff member of Cameron House, training girls in sewing and homemaking skills and leading youth and children's programs. She also worked in the Chung Mei and Ming Quong Homes for Chinese orphaned and abandoned boys and girls. In the 40's and 50's when more women were allowed to come into the community due to the War Brides Act, Mae taught new immigrants English and Naturalization classes, through which many became citizens. Mae paved the way for Chinese to participate in the government's 1959 Confession Program, which granted pardon for those who confessed to authorities about committing immigration fraud.

*By Doreen Der-McLeod. Ms. Der-McLeod is a retired social worker who served in many Chinatown non-profits, i.e. Cameron House, Chinatown Youth Center, Chinatown Community Children's Center, Chinatown Neighborhood Improvement Resource Center, and On Lok. Story sources include Ventures in Mission (by Lorna Logan) & Chinatown's Angry Angel (by Mildred Martin).*

## AMERICAN BAPTIST CHURCHES, USA: 1st Chinese Baptist Church

# The Link to New Life in America

In the Angel Island interrogation archival records of my dad's testimony while incarcerated there, the inspector wrote that my dad's answers about the layout of the village houses, neighbors, dogs and cats were "unreasonable" or "ridiculous assertions." However, to them, the most damaging was the discrepancy between what my dad said and what his alleged father said about the village church! One said the inscription on the outside of the church was "Fook Yum Tong" or "Good News Church." The other claimed it read "Tin Gee Gow Tong" or "Roman Catholic Church." For that, the case was deferred, and dad remained on the island.



Eventually, dad finally arrived in SF after production of "additional evidence desired." He immediately attended First Chinese Baptist Church night school classes to learn English taught by missionaries. One of these missionaries brought me and my siblings to church when we were youngsters. We have been with FCBC ever since.

I was blessed with the opportunity to visit my ancestral village in China. The travel guide had trouble distinguishing which village was ours, based on the name of the village, but when I told her there was a "beautiful church" that my dad told me about, she immediately located it. Not many villages have a church, she said. The inscription of the church now reads "Gae Dok Gow Tong" or "Christian church." A plaque on it showed it was remodeled by the Kaiping Christian Association in 1995.

In the end, the church was our link to the village and to my dad's Angel Island experience. It was also the link to one of his most critical endeavors as a new immigrant...learning English. It was there at the church that the city's community college district conducted ESL classes, and has done so for the last 40+ years. And, incidentally, I have just recently retired as one of those ESL instructors!

*By Anna Quan Wong. Ms. Wong is a member of First Chinese Baptist Church in San Francisco's Chinatown.*

## THE LANGUAGE BARRIER

A program director at the Cameron House in San Francisco's Chinatown, Laurene Chan, paints a picture of what the immigrant experience is like: "Imagine what it must have been like to have sailed across the ocean-wide, to part from your family and all that was familiar to you, and to arrive in a place that you believed would give you a chance at a better life. Imagine the excitement. Feel the anxiety.



Imagine that upon arrival, your dreams are quickly dashed. You are not welcomed. You are not embraced. In desperation, you seek help. But no one understands what you are saying. They look at you and say things back to you that you don't understand. Imagine the discouragement. Feel the anxiety.

Imagine that you had an emergency – a sudden pain in your stomach, a lost child, a stolen bag, an attack on your person. Imagine wanting to learn a new skill, a new trade – something to help you get on with this new life. But everything is closed to you, because you do not speak English."

# How Immigration History Repeats Itself

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*I was tired of listening to the fusillades of rifles and cannonades, so I risked stealing across the barrier to live in the United States. Who was I to know that I would be punished with imprisonment? - Angel Island detainee, 1900s*

Words of sorrow, desperation and anger were etched into the walls of the Angel Island barracks a century ago, yet they could have been written by the thousands of immigrants today who find themselves locked in detention after fleeing the economic or political turmoil (often precipitated directly, or indirectly, by US policies) of their home countries in Latin America, Asia, the Middle East, and many other parts of the world. For some their fate is death, for example, Ms. Mari Rosa, an 18-year old Haitian who coughed up blood for hours and eventually died for lack of medical attention in a Miami immigration detention facility. Or Mr. Hui Lui Ng, a 34-year old computer engineer who received deportation orders for overstaying his visa. While in detention, his cries for help for an excruciating back pain were disregarded by prison officers who considered Ng a fake. He eventually died, while in custody, of liver cancer.

This inhumane treatment of immigrants is as old as America itself, particularly during those times when Americans feel their “way of life” threatened. Throughout our history, and without exception, immigrants become the scapegoat in times of recession or national insecurity, followed by the promulgation of harsh laws and extreme policies (e.g. the Chinese Exclusion Act, the Japanese Internment, California Prop 187, post-9/11 immigrant crackdowns, and, most recently, Arizona’s SB1070). Immigration history repeats itself.

But so does the history of religious response. For example, when Ms. Donaldina Cameron assumed the role of Superintendent of the Presbyterian Mission Home in Chinatown in 1889, she discovered that Chinese immigrant women were languishing in the dismal quarters at the “docks” (pre-Angel Island). In response, she was able to convince the immigration authorities to parole the women under her care at the Mission Home. Little did she know that this remarkable action would be mirrored over a century later by a young Christian Reformed pastor who hosted, in his church building, a congregation of local Indonesian factory workers in New Jersey. When several of them were suddenly swept up by an armed, federal immigration raid and placed in detention, the young pastor managed to arrange an unusual deal with the local branch of the US Department of Homeland Security...to place the Indonesian immigrants under his church’s care during the time that each went through their deportation proceedings.

Presented ahead is a timeline of critical immigration policies (by no means comprehensive) that led up to the creation of the Angel Island Immigration Station and put side-by-side with the contemporary policies that echo them, followed by a list of various ways that congregations can, and do, respond in this critical moment in our nation’s history.



# Then...

## 1860s

With a transcontinental railroad to be built, the **Central Pacific Railroad Company** aggressively recruited thousands of Chinese men that would comprise 90% of the entire workforce, many of whom risked their lives boring tunnels in freezing conditions (giving rise to the saying, “a Chinaman’s chance in hell”). This demand for cheap labor led to the **Burlingame Treaty** with China to expedite the flow of immigration.



# ...and Now

## 1940s - present

The **Bracero Program** of the mid-1900s was instituted to address a farm labor shortage, resulting in the recruitment of 4 million Mexican workers. Although the Bracero Program promised decent wages and labor rights, its legacy is one of harsh working conditions and stolen wages. Subsequent temporary “**guest worker**” proposals included “pathways to citizenship” and protections, but all crumbled under opposition.

## 1882

Political pressure, in the face of economic insecurity, led to the **Chinese Exclusion Act** which suspended immigration of laborers for 10 years and was later renewed indefinitely in 1892. Chinese immigrants were prohibited from becoming citizens. Chinese leaving the U.S. had to obtain certificate for re-entry and those living in the U.S. had to register and get a certificate of residency. Only a limited number of merchants were allowed in the U.S. for trade.



## 1994-present

The **North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA)** is passed, but adversely affects millions of small farmers in Mexico, precipitating mass migration into the US. The 1996 **Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act** resulted in 200,000 deportations, followed in 2003 by **Operation Endgame**, a ten-year campaign to track down and deport *all* immigrants, documented or not, who are deportable.

# Then...

# ...and Now

**1885**

In **Tape vs. Hurley**, the San Francisco Board of Education decided it cannot exclude Mamie Tape, a California-born Chinese girl, from public school because of race. So a bill was passed to create a separate, segregated “**Chinese Public School**” renamed in 1906 to “**Oriental Public School**” to include Japanese and Korean students.



**1888**

The **Scott Act** rendered over 20,000 Chinese re-entry certificates null and void, including 600 Chinese who were already on their way to America while the legislation was enacted. Thus, Chinese residing in the US could not leave without risking detention and deportation upon return. The purpose was to restrict the amount of Chinese in the U.S.



**1994**

Barring children of undocumented immigrants from the public schools, along with health care and other social services, was at the core of California **Proposition 187**, otherwise known as SOS, or “**Save our State**,” which overtly characterized the act of being in California without proper documentation as “criminal conduct.”



**1996**

The 1996 **Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act** made it extremely more difficult to return back to the US if one was previously found to be undocumented, for example, a 3-year bar if found to have stayed illegally for 180 to 365 days, or a 10-year bar if possessing a year of unauthorized stay. Thousands of immigrants end up being separated from their loved ones for protracted periods of time.



# Then...

# ...and Now

## 1892

The **Geary Act** extended Chinese Exclusion 10 more years (to the original 10) and required all Chinese to carry permits. If any Chinese laborer within the US without his certificate of residency was “deemed and adjudged to be [here] unlawfully,” they could be arrested and forced to do hard labor, and be deported after a year. Also during this year, **Ellis Island Immigration Station** on the East Coast was built.



## 2004-2010

Modeled after California's Prop 187, Arizona passed **Prop 200** which required social service agencies to ID all applicants and to hand them over to federal immigration authorities if found to be undocumented. Six years later, a highly controversial (and still contested) bill **SB1070** would require all law enforcement officers to ask for papers if “reasonably suspected” to be undocumented (and thus encouraging the practice of racial profiling).

## 1910

Although often referred to as the “Ellis Island of the West,” to the US, the **Angel Island Immigration Center** existed primarily as a vehicle to stem, and control, the flow of *Chinese* immigration into the US. Functioning more as a detention center than a gateway, its inhabitants experienced demoralization and despair, separated from family members and crowded in tight living quarters. Here, they endured long stays with an unbeknownst fate.



## Today

Now, the US spends nearly 1.7 billion per year detaining over 380,000 immigrants, most of whom are deported. Internal audits regularly reveal health & safety violations. Detention numbers have grown steadily since 1994, when there were about 5,000 immigrants held in detention, with a dramatic spike in 2006 due to massive sweeps, like **Operation Return-to-Sender**, conducted by Immigration & Customs Enforcement (**ICE**).

# Congregational Engagement Today

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Like the faithful leaders and congregations of the past, we are called to embrace the “strangers in our midst” and love our neighbors. In response to the struggles of immigrants who have come here under desperate circumstances or who face unfair treatment, faith communities across the country are actively addressing needs as well as the broken systems and policies that adversely affect them. Here are some ways you can join us:

- Pray for the well-being of our immigrant families and the role we are to play, both individually and collectively.
- Be a congregational community for those who lack family, providing companionship, material support, or accompaniment at immigration proceedings or deportation hearings.
- Listen to their stories. Get further educated by reading books and online publications (see Appendix I)
- Join with other local congregations or coalitions (see Appendix II) to stay informed about immigration issues at the local (e.g. ICE raids, federal-local police collaboration, city ordinances, hate crimes, etc.) national level, and explore ways to serve or advocate collectively.
- Join, or organize, a “rapid-response” team to provide support and presence to families during an ICE raid.
- Foster awareness among your congregation through prayer offerings, educational forums, films, study groups, or the personal testimonies of immigrants.
- Organize a delegation to visit, and learn about, the U.S.-Mexico border in California, Texas or Arizona.
- Write your congressman to raise your concern for just and humane immigration policy (see Appendix III)

Lastly, we invite you to help us continue the work (see back cover) of uncovering, and bringing to light, the many stories of our predecessors who faithfully served, and advocated for, the Angel Island detainees...and their families when they reached the shore. Such congregational stories become an important source of strength, instruction, and inspiration in the work needed today on behalf of our immigrant neighbors who suffer under the current wave of public hostility and unjust laws.

# APPENDIX I

## Angel Island & Chinese Immigration History Resources

### Angel Island Immigration Station Foundation

Their mission is to promote a greater understanding of Pacific Coast immigration and its role in shaping America's past, present and future. [www.aiisf.org](http://www.aiisf.org)

### Angel Island Association

Primary mission is to facilitate the preservation, restoration and interpretation of historical and natural resources on Angel Island, to enhance the visitor experience and build a community of support. [www.angelisland.org](http://www.angelisland.org)

### Chinese American Citizen Alliance

A nonprofit founded by a group of people of Chinese ancestry in 1895 who were denied equal rights as American Citizens. [www.cacasf.org](http://www.cacasf.org)

### Chinese American Experience, Harpers Weekly

An historical overview of Chinese American history from 1857-92, the post-Gold Rush period, by Prof. William Wei, University of Colorado at Boulder [www.harperweek.com](http://www.harperweek.com) (click on *The Chinese American Experience*)

### Chinese Historical Society of America

Dedicated to the documentation, study, and presentation of Chinese American history. Promotes legacies of Chinese America through exhibitions, publications, and educational, public programming. [www.chsa.org](http://www.chsa.org)

### Chinese Historical Society of Southern California

Exists to bring together people with a mutual interest in the historical role of Chinese, and promote the heritage of the Chinese American community to better appreciate our rich, multi-cultural society. [www.chssc.org](http://www.chssc.org)

### National Archives & Records Administration (San Bruno, CA)

Federal agency housing immigration records for California, Nevada, Hawaii, other Pacific states. <http://www.archives.gov/pacific/san-francisco/>

### PBS - Ancestors in the Americas

Includes an Asian American Timeline to learn about specific moments and events that shaped Asian American history. Also available are links to other Chinese history resources. [www.pbs.org/ancestorsoftheamericas](http://www.pbs.org/ancestorsoftheamericas)

### VIDEOS

#### Discovering Angel Island: The Story Behind the Poems .

A 3-part series about life on the island. [www.kqed.org/pacificlink](http://www.kqed.org/pacificlink)

#### Separate Lives, Broken Dreams.

Captures the notorious saga of Chinese immigration in American history. [www.asianamericanmedia.org/separatelivesbrokendreams/](http://www.asianamericanmedia.org/separatelivesbrokendreams/)

**Carved in Silence.** San Francisco: National Asian American Telecommunications Association, 1988. Available in public libraries.

### BOOKS

#### Angel Island: Immigrant Gateway to America

Erika Lee and Judy Yung. Boston: Oxford University Press, August 2010

#### Asian Americans: An Interpretive History.

Sucheng Chan. Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1991.

#### Chinese American Voices: From Gold Rush to the Present

Judy Yung, Gordon Chang, Lai Him Mark. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010

#### In Sight of America - Photography and the Development of US Immigration Policy.

Anna Pegler-Gordon, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009

#### Island: Poetry and History of Chinese Immigrants on Angel Island, 1910-1940.

Him Mark Lai, Genny Lim, Judy Yung. San Francisco: HOC DOI, 1980.

#### Making and Remaking of Asian America through Immigration Policy, 1850-1990.

Bill Ong Hing. Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1993

#### Strangers from a Different Shore.

Ronald Takaki. Boston: Little Brown & Co., 1989.



## APPENDIX II

# Immigration Policy Education & Advocacy Organizations

### America's Voice

Speaks directly to key audiences through mainstream and Spanish language media, conducts opinion research, and campaigns, for comprehensive immigration reform.

[www.americasvoiceonline.org](http://www.americasvoiceonline.org)

### Asian Law Caucus

Legal and civil rights organization serving the low-income Asian Pacific American communities in San Francisco Bay Area. Their ASPIRE program works with APA undocumented students.

[www.asianlawcaucus.org/alc/programs/aspire](http://www.asianlawcaucus.org/alc/programs/aspire)

### Asian American Justice Center

Works to advance the human and civil rights for Asian Americans, and build and promote a fair and equitable society for all. [www.advancingequality.org](http://www.advancingequality.org)

### Black Alliance for Just Immigration

African American and black immigrants working toward uniting communities for just and fair immigration reform. [www.blackalliance.org](http://www.blackalliance.org)

### California Immigrant Policy Center

A nonpartisan organization informing public debate and policy on issues affecting the state's immigrants. [www.caimmigrant.org](http://www.caimmigrant.org)

### Detention Watch Network

Addresses the immigration detention crisis, working reform the U.S. detention and deportation system [www.detentionwatchnetwork.org](http://www.detentionwatchnetwork.org)

### Immigration Bulletin Daily

Daily digest of immigration-related news from Matthew Bender, a provider of legal research tools. [www.bibdaily.com](http://www.bibdaily.com)

### Immigrant Legal Resource Center

A national resource center that provides trainings, materials and advocacy to advance immigrant rights. [www.ilrc.org](http://www.ilrc.org)

### Immigration Advocates Network

National online network that support legal advocacy working on behalf of immigrants' rights. [www.immigrationadvocates.org](http://www.immigrationadvocates.org)

### National Network for Immigrant and Refugee Rights

Educates, and coordinates plans of action, on immigrant and refugee issues. Produces publications, e.g. *Over-raided, Under Siege*, to inform the public on human rights violations. [www.nnirr.org](http://www.nnirr.org)

### Reform Immigration for America

Unites individuals and grassroots organizations to build support for immigration reform. [www.reformimmigrationforamerica.org](http://www.reformimmigrationforamerica.org)

### SF Immigration & Legal Education Network

A collaboration of agencies serving the immigrant community of San Francisco.

[www.sfirmigrantnetwork.org](http://www.sfirmigrantnetwork.org)

## FAITH-BASED ORGANIZATIONS & RESOURCES

### Catholic Legal Immigration Network, Inc.

Resources from network of Catholic legal immigration programs that enhance and expand affordable services. [www.cliniclegal.org](http://www.cliniclegal.org)

### Christians for Comprehensive Immigration Reform

Organizations & churches across theological & political spectrum for comprehensive immigration reform. [www.faithandimmigration.org](http://www.faithandimmigration.org)

### Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society Advocacy

Essential lifesaving services to world Jewry, through its mission of rescue, reunion and resettlement [www.advocacy.hias.org](http://www.advocacy.hias.org)

### Immigration Resources - Faith Statements

A collection of formal statements on immigration written by denominational and other religious bodies. Faith-based books on immigration. [www.gum.org/immigration](http://www.gum.org/immigration)

### Interfaith Coalition for Immigrant Rights (CLUE-CA)

Interfaith advocacy in Northern Cal for the rights and dignity of the immigrant community. Local coalitions. [www.icir-clue.blogspot.com](http://www.icir-clue.blogspot.com)

### Interfaith Immigration Coalition.

partnership of faith-based organizations committed to enacting fair and humane immigration reform. [www.interfaithimmigration.com](http://www.interfaithimmigration.com)

### Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service

Articles and advocacy resources by a Lutheran agency that serves to advocate for refugees and immigrants. [www.lirs.org](http://www.lirs.org)

### New Sanctuary Movement

Clergy and congregations that serve to protect immigrant families from unjust deportation. [www.newsanctuarymovement.org](http://www.newsanctuarymovement.org)



# APPENDIX III

## Writing Your Elected Leaders

### WHY WRITE A LETTER?

Our elected leaders have the important role of writing or deciding on bills that affect, for better or worse, the well-being of individuals and families both within, and outside of, our borders. As residents, it is our responsibility to let our leaders know what issues, e.g. the need for just and humane immigration policy, are important to us.

The letter is the most popular form of communication with your House Representative or Senator. This list of suggestions can help to improve the effectiveness of your letter:

1. Your purpose for writing should be stated in the first paragraph. If your letter pertains to a specific piece of legislation, identify it accordingly:  
  
e.g. House Bill: H.R. \_\_\_\_\_, or Senate Bill S. \_\_\_\_\_.
2. Be courteous, to the point, and include key information, using examples to support your position. Feel free to connect your concern to your own family's history of immigration.
3. Deal with only one issue per letter, and if possible, keep your letter to one page, or no more than two.
4. Use the guidelines (see right) to formally address your recipient.

### HOW TO FIND YOUR REPRESENTATIVES

The following websites have an online-tool which enable you to identify the names and addresses of your elected leaders:

- Project Vote Smart [www.votesmart.org](http://www.votesmart.org)
- League of Women Voters [www.lwv.org](http://www.lwv.org)
- Official Government Portal [www.usa.gov](http://www.usa.gov)

### HOW TO ADDRESS YOUR CORRESPONDENCE WITH A SENATOR

The Honorable (Full Name)  
(Rm.#) (Section name) Senate Office Building  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator:

### HOW TO ADDRESS YOUR HOUSE REPRESENTATIVE

The Honorable (Full Name)  
(Rm.#) (Section name) House Office Building  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative:

**Note:** When writing to the Chair of a Committee or the Speaker of the House, to address them as: Dear Mr. Chairman, Madame Chairwoman, or Mr. Speaker:

### ADDRESSING CORRESPONDENCE USING EMAIL

Follow the same suggestions as for a printed letter. For the subject line of your e-mail, identify your message by topic or bill number. Be sure to include your contact information (name, street address, city, state and zip code) in the letter:

### AN ONLINE ALTERNATIVE TO WRITE YOUR HOUSE REPRESENTATIVES

Go to [www.house.gov/writerep](http://www.house.gov/writerep) and follow their instructions.



Do you have a faith-rooted story about the  
Angel Island immigration experience?  
Know someone who does?

Contact us at:  
[dlee@clueca.org](mailto:dlee@clueca.org)

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The Pilgrimage to Angel Island Committee & the Interfaith Coalition for Immigrant Rights (CLUE-CA).

