

GUIDE TO THE ANGEL ISLAND STATE PARK PHOTOGRAPHIC COLLECTION

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ANGEL ISLAND STATE PARK PHOTOGRAPHIC COLLECTION

Park History

The largest natural island in the San Francisco Bay, Angel Island contains over one square mile of abundant natural and historical resources (**Figure 1**). Angel Island State Park encompasses the entirety of the island's 740 acres except for 3 coastal points—Point Stuart, Point Knox, and Point Blunt—that are owned and operated by the U. S. Coast Guard. Nestled between Marin and San Francisco counties, the park is located approximately 6 miles north of the city of San Francisco and 1.5 miles south and east of the Tiburon Peninsula. The island is accessible by private boat or public ferry from the cities of San Francisco, Tiburon, and Vallejo.



Figure 1. Aerial view of Angel Island with Golden Gate Bridge in background, after 1936.
Catalog # 090-80.

Two-thousand years ago, coastal Miwok hunters and fishermen began establishing their presence on the island, enjoying its abundant natural resources into the late eighteenth century when Europeans first arrived. The Spanish encountered the island in 1769 as part of an exploring expedition. Six years later, Lieutenant Juan Manuel de Ayala and his pilot, José de Cañizares, drafting one of the earliest maps of the area, christened the island *Isla de Los Angeles*. For the next several decades, Angel Island served as a meeting place for pirates, smugglers, and duelists until, in 1839, Mexican governor of California Juan Bautista Alvarado granted Antonio Maria Osio title to graze cattle there. But with the U.S. acquisition of California following the Mexican-American War, Osio, fighting a protracted legal battle, lost his claim and all ranching rights to the island. In 1850, President Millard Fillmore declared the area a U.S. military reserve and thus ended Angel Island's historic uses—fishing, hunting, smuggling,

dueling, logging, and ranching—and began its multi-faceted century-spanning career as a military installation.

During the Civil War, Union General George Wright procured \$100,000 from the War Department to fortify the island's defenses against a possible Confederate attack on San Francisco. He established Camp Reynolds, named for Major General John Reynolds, who was killed at the Battle of Gettysburg, and built three artillery batteries. Never used during the war, Camp Reynolds became the army's general reception and distribution depot for new recruits serving in the West beginning in 1866. During the Spanish-American War, Angel Island also served as a detention center, not only for Spanish prisoners of war but also for Native Americans captured during Arizona campaigns. Decades later, the island again housed prisoners taken in both world wars in addition to "enemy aliens" extracted from the civilian population.

In 1900, the War Department officially designated the island "Fort McDowell" after Major General Irwin McDowell. It also renamed the camps: Camp Reynolds became "West Garrison" and Fort McDowell (the camp, not the island) became "East Garrison." By 1939, Angel Island had become the nation's most heavily trafficked overseas discharge and replacement depot and claimed a permanent staff numbering close to 300. To support the employees and their families, officials established a grade school, a library, a bowling alley, a movie theater, and a Catholic church.

In addition to using the island for prisoner detention and troop distribution, the federal government sought to secure the west coast from yellow fever, cholera, plague, and other diseases in 1890. The island's quarantine station was constructed the following year. Every week, the station received scores of ships in Hospital Cove—now named "Ayala Cove"—where medical personnel inspected passengers and crews for diseases, fumigated ships coming from known disease-harboring ports, and either quarantined or deported sick individuals. The station was operational until 1946, when the U.S. Public Health Service abandoned its facilities on the island.

Despite the park's extensive military history, it is perhaps best known today for the Angel Island Immigration Station. Active between 1910 and 1940, the station ultimately processed more than one million immigrants arriving via Pacific routes from various points of origin (**Figure 2**). In addition to receiving immigrants from all over the world—Eastern Europe, Asia, the Caribbean, South and Central America—one of the station's key responsibilities was the enforcement of the Chinese Exclusion Act. Enacted in 1882 and renewed until 1943, the law restricted Chinese entry into the United States with exceptions made for residents' family members, teachers, consular officials, tourists, and merchants. Although some immigrants were only detained for a few days, others remained at the station for weeks and months; some even languished at the camp for years. Decades later, Ranger Alex Weiss noticed calligraphy carvings, which officials had ignored: Chinese men and women had carved their stories into the walls of the detention facility (**Figure 3**). The station ultimately closed in 1940 after a massive fire destroyed the administration building.



Figure 2. Immigrants from various points of origin disembarking at Immigration Station dock, after 1905. Catalog # 090-543.

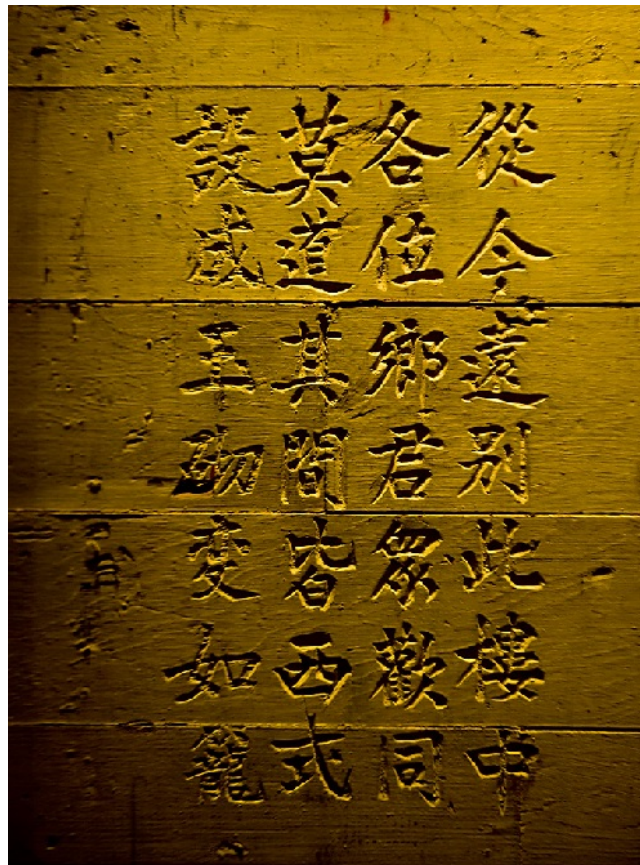


Figure 3. Excavated Chinese poetry wall carvings, July 2, 2010. Catalog # 090-P69483.

In 1946, the U.S. Army declared Angel Island "surplus property" and abandoned its outposts (**Figure 4**). The following year, the War Assets Administration assumed disposal responsibilities, delegating those duties to the Department of the Interior to be executed by the National Park Service. In 1953, the California Division of Beaches and Parks acquired Hospital Cove and by 1958, it also took control of 184 acres of the surrounding area. In 1954, the Secretary of the Interior returned control of the island to the army for construction of the Nike missile site; however, by 1962, the Army deemed the weapons system obsolete and left the island for good the following year (**Figure 5**). That same year, the State of California assumed control of the entire island (except for the three Coast Guard units) and classified Angel Island a state park.

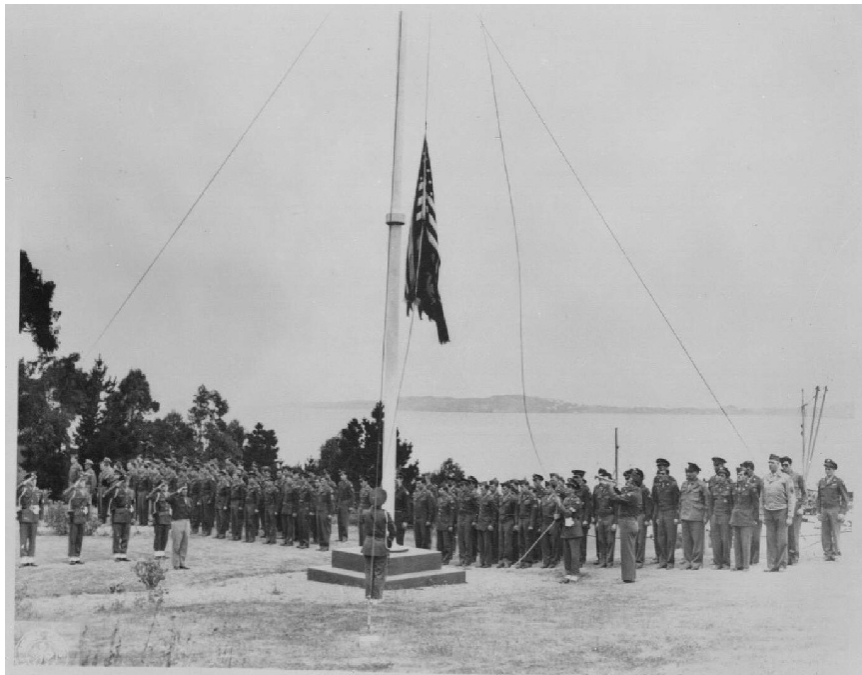


Figure 4. U.S. Army evacuating Angel Island, 1946. Catalog # 090-323.



Figure 5. Nike missile site near Point Blunt, ca. 1960. Catalog # 090-623.

California State Parks, coordinating with the Angel Island Conservancy and the Angel Island Immigration Station Foundation, has launched a comprehensive campaign to preserve, restore, and interpret the island's many natural and historical resources. In addition to restoring historic buildings and structures—including the Angel Island Immigration Station, declared a National Historic Landmark in 1997—California State Parks has also worked tirelessly as an environmental steward. Park personnel have replanted native oak, bay, madrone, and other trees and shrubs that had been eliminated during the island's nineteenth-century wood-harvesting period. Additionally, they have tended non-native trees like eucalyptus and Monterey pine, deemed historically significant for their associations with the U.S. Army and the Immigration Service periods. Besides historic and natural tours, Angel Island State Park offers other forms of recreation to the public, including hiking, bicycling, boating, and kayaking. The island also contains four camping areas, providing the public with stunning sunrise vistas of the Golden Gate Bridge, the city of San Francisco, and other nearby attractions.

Scope and Content

The Angel Island State Park Photographic Collection spans the years 1775-2010, with the bulk of the collection covering the years 1900-1940, 1949-1995, and 2010. There is a total of 1,636 cataloged images including 1,114 photographic prints, scans, and negatives, 414 35mm slides, and 108 born-digital images. Of this total, only 643 images have been positively attributed to any known California State Parks photographers.

Angel Island is best known today for its prominent role in immigration history. Most of the cataloged images pertaining to this theme have been scanned from the Angel Island Lantern Slides Collection, originally created by the Lantern Slide and Lecture Department of the Board of Foreign Missions of the Methodist Episcopal Church in New York City, presumably to document the organization's "good works." Slides show both immigrants and Immigration Service personnel in the course of their daily activities. Imagery depicts: ships entering San Francisco Bay via the Golden Gate; immigrants disembarking at the Immigration Station dock; Asian immigrants detained at the Immigration Station; Immigration Service officials interviewing Chinese immigrants; immigrant adults and children held under hospital quarantine; immigrant babies born on Angel Island; and Christian missionary Miss Katharine Maurer teaching scripture and handicrafts to immigrants, supervising immigrant workers, and distributing Christmas presents. Additionally, there are numerous individual and group portraits which include: Japanese "picture brides;" Chinese men, women, children, and families; Russian refugees from the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution; Italian and East Indian men; and mothers with children from all across the globe.

Supplementing these early twentieth-century images, the collection also contains more recently captured photographs of the now-famous "Chinese poetry carvings." In 1970, the Angel Island Immigration Station was slated for demolition when Ranger Alex Weiss noticed the poems and reported them to the park's administrators, who ignored them. Convinced of its historical significance, Weiss then took the information to nearby San Francisco, where he quickly generated a groundswell of public interest. Painted over for decades, today these ornate carvings humanize and highlight indefinitely detained immigrants' historic struggle with institutional racism as well as their indomitable will to enter America.

Beyond images relating to immigration, the bulk of the collection depicts Angel Island's multiple installations, the various buildings and structures on the island, island staff—including military personnel, federal employees, and park rangers—and the natural scenery of the island itself. Documenting the camps, images include ground and aerial views of Camp Reynolds (West Garrison), Fort McDowell (East Garrison), Hospital (Ayala) Cove, and Point Knox. Also showcased are myriad buildings and structures such as docks, wharfs, piers, warehouses, administration buildings, the North Garrison Central Heating Plant, detention barracks, dormitories, hospitals, water tanks, the Point Knox bell house, the Southside Quarry rock crusher, quartermaster's stable, commissaries, guard towers, the Shafter House, and numerous boats, both docked and at sea. The collection also depicts a variety of workers on the island including Immigration Station employees, Quarantine Station medical personnel, U.S. Army soldiers at batteries Ledyard and Wallace, and park rangers engaging with visitors. Owing to the generous donations of their descendants, Immigration Station employee Albert Thau and his family, as well as Power Plant Chief Engineer Henry C. Niemann and his wife, feature prominently in the collection, often posing in front of Julia Morgan-designed employee cottages. The collection also offers scenic vistas with its inclusion of aerial and panoramic views of Angel Island, Mount Livermore, the Golden Gate Bridge, Alcatraz Island, the City of San Francisco, and other locations from various vantages.

Other subjects and activities depicted include: dock repairs and sewer system maintenance; surveys of deer-browsed vegetation as well as deer-reduction efforts; monuments, interpretive panels, and exhibits distributed throughout the park; and various ceremonies and events including Governor Goodwin Knight accepting the Angel Island deed transfer in 1954, the 1970 Historical Landmark dedication ceremony, Governor Ronald Reagan's visit to promote the 1974 Park Bond Act, and the 2010 Swearing-In Ceremony for new citizens.

Although the Angel Island State Park Photographic Collection tells a compelling, transformative history spanning over a century, the story as told currently is incomplete. The collection's coverage of the twentieth century could be expanded in key areas. First, the current cataloged collection does not depict the island's use as a detention facility for captured prisoners of war and "enemy aliens" during either world war or the Spanish-American War. Second, the decade between 1940 and 1950 is incredibly sparse. In addition to the island's World War II POW camp, the 1940s saw the fire that destroyed the North Garrison Administration Building, compelling the Immigration Station's closure in 1940; the collection currently has only two images relating to the fire. Moreover, that decade also saw the Army's evacuation from the island in 1946, another event only minimally represented in the collection. Third, the collection's coverage of the Nike missile site, 1954-1962, is also confined to a small handful of images. And finally, unlike other state parks with restored historical resources, Angel Island's photographic holdings do not include much documentation of the important restoration work performed there, save for images of deteriorated ruins.

Related Collections

Angel Island Foundation Committee Records, UC Berkeley: Bancroft Library.

Angel Island Oral History Collection, UC Davis: Special Collections.

Angel Island Oral History Project, UC Santa Cruz: Special Collections and Archives, and UC Berkeley: Ethnic Studies Library

Angel Island Publications, Inc. Records, Stanford University: Manuscripts Division.

Angel Island State Park Collection, California State Parks Archives.

The Chinese in California Virtual Collection, UC Berkeley: Bancroft Library.

Katharine R. Maurer Collection, California State Library: California History Room.

Public Health Service Records, National Archives and Records Administration: NARA Pacific Region (San Bruno, CA).

Catalog Subject Search Terms

Aerial view
Albert Thau
Alcatraz
Ayala Cove
Barracks
Battery Knox
Battery Ledyard
Battery Wallace
Bay Bridge
Camp Reynolds
Chapel
Chinese
Coast Guard
Construction
Deer
Detention
Katherine Maurer
Lighthouse
Map
Marin County
Mess hall
Miwok
Monument
Mount Livermore
Mount Tamalpais
Nike missile(s)
North Garrison
Oakland-Bay Bridge
Painting
Panorama view
Parade Ground
Pier
Poetry carvings
Point Blunt
Point Knox
Point Stuart
Officers' quarters
Quarantine Station
Quarry
Rock crusher
San Francisco
San Francisco Bay
Dock
Document
Drawing
East Garrison
Employee(s)
Employee cottage(s)
Employee housing
Employee residence(s)
Exhibit(s)
Fort McDowell
Golden Gate Bridge
Hospital Cove
Immigrant(s)
Immigration Station
Japanese picture bride(s)
Julia Morgan
Ship(s)
Soldier(s)
Tent(s)
Tiburon
U. S. Army
Visitor(s)
West Garrison