

# Angel Island

## A History of the Island and the Records Generated

At roughly 740 acres, Angel Island is the largest natural island in San Francisco Bay. Today, the island is a place to hike, bike, camp, and picnic. Its history as an immigration station from 1910-1940 is also well-known, but the history of Angel Island is long and rich.

For hundreds, and quite possibly thousands, of years, the Coast Miwok utilized Angel Island for hunting and fishing, though they likely never inhabited the island.

Just a few months after the start of the American Revolution, Spanish explorer, Juan Manuel de Ayala, was the captain of the first European ship to enter San Francisco Bay, anchoring near Angel Island. Ayala and his crew stayed for one month, drafting the first charted map of the bay.

California remained under Spanish colonial rule until 1821, at which time Mexico gained independence from Spain. California was then ruled by Mexico until 1848. During this time, Antonio María Osio applied for and was given a land grant that included all of Angel Island, as well as Point Reyes. Osio used Angel Island as a cattle ranch. After the United States declared war on Mexico in 1846, the U.S. military took possession of Angel Island, invalidating Osio's land grant, and thus beginning a relationship between the military and the island which would last until the 1960s. [Look for information about early California land records at NARA, Bureau of Land Management, and the California State Archives.]

On September 9, 1850, California became the 31<sup>st</sup> state in the Union. Two months later, California was included in the Federal census for the first time, and Angel Island was designated as a place in the 1870 census. (Marin County is one of the original 27 counties of California. Most of the island is in Marin County, though a portion is in San Francisco County.) [See History of California on Wikipedia for extensive list of resources.]

The Civil War began in 1861, and by 1863 there was a threat of a Confederate attack in San Francisco. The entire island became a military reservation known as Camp Reynolds, later called West Garrison. In 1864, the first of five hospitals was built. Camp Reynolds eventually grew to include a church, trading store, blacksmith shop, bakery, and a second hospital. In 1886, the first of three lighthouses was built on the island, Point Knox. The second was built on Point Stuart in 1915, and the third on Point Blunt in 1960. [Check NARA catalog for assorted military and lighthouse records.]

In 1891, a quarantine station was established in Ayala Cove, subsequently renamed Hospital Cove. It was in operation for 65 years of public service. Ships and baggage were fumigated. Ill immigrants were detained at the third hospital built on the island. [The San Bruno branch of NARA houses most records of the Quarantine Station.]



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After the United States declared war on Spain in 1898, the military ran a “detention camp” to isolate soldiers returning from the Philippines and who might carry infectious diseases. A new camp was built near the quarry and the entire island was renamed Fort McDowell. From this point, Angel Island (or Fort McDowell) processed thousands of soldiers on their way to and from the Pacific region. [Look for military records at NARA.]

Angel Island is probably most well-known for the Immigration Station that opened in 1910 and operated until 1940. Some individuals mistakenly call this the “Ellis Island of the West.” However, while Ellis Island welcomed immigrants, Angel Island was intended to **exclude** many of them, specifically Asians. Chinese immigrants were particularly scrutinized and interrogated, and often were detained for weeks, months, and occasionally years. Japanese immigrants typically had much shorter stays at the Immigration Station.

Trans-Pacific ships carrying immigrants went first to San Francisco where papers were checked; officials, merchants, and legitimate travelers were allowed to disembark there. The others were transported to Angel Island. Whites were separated from Asians, and Chinese were separated from other Asians. [Many of those detained have case files held at NARA in San Bruno.]

In 1940, a catastrophic fire destroyed the Administration Building and many of the records. Immigration Services were moved to San Francisco and the island’s facilities were returned to the military. During WWII, the former immigration barracks were used to detain prisoners of war before they were sent to other locations. During the Cold War, the military created a Nike Missile site on the island, though no weapons were deployed. [Check NARA catalog for POW records.]

Remnants of the rich history on Angel Island remain today. The Park Visitor Center near Ayala Cove was once the Bachelor Officers’ Quarters for the Quarantine Station. The barracks from the Immigration Station have become a museum and the Immigration Station Hospital is currently being renovated. Assorted military buildings from the Civil War to World War II still stand.

Discovering the documents related to your ancestors who lived and worked on the island, or who passed through as soldiers or immigrants, will enrich your family history.

The above information was primarily obtained from the Angel Island Immigration Station Foundation ([aiisf.org](http://aiisf.org)), the Angel Island Conservancy ([angelisland.org](http://angelisland.org)) and Wikipedia.



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## Angel Island Online Resources

Allensworth's Utopia, California Department of Parks and Recreation (Captain Allen Allensworth biography) 2014  
[http://www.150.parks.ca.gov/?page\\_id=27536](http://www.150.parks.ca.gov/?page_id=27536)

Angel Island Conservancy  
<http://angelisland.org/>

Angel Island: Immigrant Journeys of Chinese Americans, Stories of Chinese immigrants  
<http://www.angel-island.com/history.html>

Angel Island Immigration Station Foundation  
<http://www.aiisf.org/>

Asian Resources at NARA  
<http://www.archives.gov/research/alic/reference/ethnic-heritage.html - asian>

California Department of Parks and Recreation, U.S. Army on the island  
[http://www.parks.ca.gov/?page\\_id=1307](http://www.parks.ca.gov/?page_id=1307)

California History Room at California State Library  
<http://www.library.ca.gov/calhist/pdf/SelectedGuide.pdf>

California Land and Property  
[https://familysearch.org/wiki/en/California\\_Land\\_and\\_Property](https://familysearch.org/wiki/en/California_Land_and_Property)

Chinese Immigration to the United States 1884-1944: A Digital Archive  
<http://vm136.lib.berkeley.edu/BANC/collections/chinese-immigration-to-the-united-states-1884-1944/>

Chinese Immigration Records, Chinese Exclusion Act Case Files  
<http://www.archives.gov/research/chinese-americans/>

Golden Gate National Recreation Area (NPS) Museum and Archives at Presidio Building 667  
<http://www.mapsofworld.com/usa/facts-and-trivia/was-california-part-of-mexico.html>

Index to Immigration Investigation Case Files, RG 85  
Created 1985-1986, index covers inactive immigration case files from 1903-1944  
<https://catalog.archives.gov/id/2902860>

Indexes to Passenger Lists of Vessels Arriving at San Francisco, California, 5/1/1893 - 5/9/1934  
(on Ancestry.com and on microfilm at NARA)



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<https://catalog.archives.gov/id/4498997>

Legal Information Institute: The United States Appellants, v. Antonio María Oso  
<https://www.law.cornell.edu/supremecourt/text/64/273>

Lists of Chinese Passenger Arrivals at San Francisco, California, 8/9/1882 - 12/25/1914 1934  
(on Ancestry.com and on microfilm at NARA)

<https://catalog.archives.gov/id/4481626>

Lighthouses of California (California Beaches)

<http://www.californiabeaches.com/map/lighthouses-california/>

Lighthouse Research at NARA

<https://www.archives.gov/research/military/logbooks/lighthouses.html>

Lighthouses of the United States: Northern California

<https://www.unc.edu/~rowlett/lighthouse/ca.htm>

National Park Service, U.S. Immigration Station, Angel Island, San Francisco Bay, California

[https://www.nps.gov/nr/travel/american\\_latino\\_heritage/us\\_immigration\\_station\\_angel\\_island.html](https://www.nps.gov/nr/travel/american_latino_heritage/us_immigration_station_angel_island.html)

National Park Service, San Francisco Maritime Museum

<https://www.nps.gov/safr/learn/historyculture/museum-collections.htm>

Prologue Magazine: The EARS Have It: A Web Search Tool for Investigation Case Files from the Chinese Exclusion Era; Robert Barde, William Greene, Daniel Nealand; Fall 2003

[http://staff.haas.berkeley.edu/barde/\\_public/immigration/EARS\\_complete.pdf](http://staff.haas.berkeley.edu/barde/_public/immigration/EARS_complete.pdf)

Prologue Magazine: Modern American Poetry: Angel Island: Guardian of the Western Gate; Valerie Natale; Summer 1998, Vol. 30, No. 2

[http://www.english.illinois.edu/maps/poets/a\\_f/angel/natale.html](http://www.english.illinois.edu/maps/poets/a_f/angel/natale.html)

Prologue Magazine: When the Enemy Landed at Angel Island; Maria Sakovich; Summer 2009, Vol. 41, No. 2

<http://www.archives.gov/publications/prologue/2009/summer/angel.html>

Online Archive of California: Guide to the Angel Island State Park Collection, held at the California State Park Archives; materials span 1839-2014, but most items 1950-2010

<http://www.oac.cdlib.org/findaid/ark:/13030/c87h1q38/>

Online Archive of California: Guide to the Katherine R. Mauer Collection, 1913-1977

[http://www.oac.cdlib.org/findaid/ark:/13030/tf1g50016n/entire\\_text/](http://www.oac.cdlib.org/findaid/ark:/13030/tf1g50016n/entire_text/)



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The *San Carlos*, First Spanish Ship to Enter S.F. Bay (sfbaytimetraveler)

<https://sfbaytimetraveler.wordpress.com/about/the-san-carlos-first-spanish-ship-to-enter-the-s-f-bay/facts-and-trivia/was-california-part-of-mexico.html>

World War II in the San Francisco Bay Area

<http://www.mapsofworld.com/usa/facts-and-trivia/was-california-part-of-mexico.html>

WWI Investigative Case Files through Angel Island at San Bruno (mostly about Ernst Hamann)

[https://catalog.archives.gov/search?q=\\*&f.parentNald=296430&f.level=item&sort=naldSort%20asc](https://catalog.archives.gov/search?q=*&f.parentNald=296430&f.level=item&sort=naldSort%20asc)

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Benedict, Sheila. *NGS Research in the States Series: Virginia*: National Genealogical Society, 2015.

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Lee, Erika. *The Making of Asian America: A History*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 2015.

Lee, Erika, Judy Yung. *Angel Island: Immigrant Gateway to America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2010.

Osio, Antonio María. *The History of Alta California: A Memoir of Mexican California*. Translation by Rose Marie Beebe and Robert M. Senkewicz. Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1996.

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