Immigration at the Golden Gate
Passenger Ships, Exclusion, and Angel Island
by Robert Eric Barde

Endorsement from Judy Yung, Professor Emeritus of American Studies, University of California, Santa Cruz

Robert Barde’s Immigration at the Golden Gate is a treasure trove of meticulously researched and dramatically recounted stories of the different players involved in transpacific travel and the immigration industry at the port of San Francisco. It is a valuable resource and must read for anyone interested in the history, economics, and politics of Asian immigration and exclusion at Angel Island.

Endorsement From Alan M. Kraut, Professor of History, American University:

Through the lens of one Chinese female immigrant's twenty month detention on Angel Island scholar Robert Barde allows readers to view the struggle of newcomers for fair treatment after the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act. Barde's skillful unpacking of this moving episode offers readers an invaluable perspective on how restrictive immigration policy was enforced against Chinese in an earlier era. His work is an invaluable companion to accounts of the legislative debates, political machinations, and racism that resulted in Chinese Exclusion. And, his is a cautionary tale chillingly relevant to contemporary policy debates over exclusion and detention.

Endorsement from William Kooiman, Reference Librarian, San Francisco Maritime National Historical Park:

With this well-researched work Mr. Barde has filled a void in the history of Asian immigration to San Francisco. Covering every aspect of the immigrant experience the book is very readable. His chapter on the "Life and Death of the China Mail Steamship Line" won the Karl Kortum award for maritime history presented by the Friends of the San Francisco Maritime Library.

Description

"Angel Island" is more than a rocky outpost inside the mouth of San Francisco Bay, more, even, than shorthand for the various government facilities--military, health, and immigration--that guarded the Western Gate. "Angel Island" reminds us of an important chapter in the history of immigration to the United States, one that was truly a "multicultural" enterprise long before that expression was first imagined.

Perhaps 200,000 immigrants passed through the Angel Island Immigration Station during its lifetime, a tiny number compared to the 17 million who entered through New York's Ellis Island. Nonetheless, Angel Island's place in the consciousness of Americans on the West Coast is large, out of all proportion to the numerical record. This place is not conceded fondly or with gratitude. Angel Island's Immigration Station was not, as some have called it, the "Ellis Island of the West," built to facilitate the "processing" and entry of those welcomed as new Americans. Its role was less benign: to facilitate the exclusion of Asians--first the Chinese, then Japanese, Koreans, Indians, and other Asians. This was
the era when a rampant public hostility to newcomers posed grave threats to the liberties of all immigrants, especially those from Asia.

With the impending restoration of the Immigration Station, "Angel Island" may well become as much part of the American collective imagination as "Ellis Island"--but with its own, quite different, twist. This book shows how natives and newcomers experienced the immigration process on the west coast. Although Angel Island's role in American immigration was greatest at the dawn of the previous century, the process of immigration continues. The voices of a century ago--of exclusion, of bureaucratic and judicial nightmares, of the interwoven interests of migrants and business people, of the fear of foreigners and their diseases, of moral ambiguity and uncertainty--all echo to the present day.

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