

Angel Island station an endangered historic site

National trust hopes to restore West's Ellis Island

By **HARRY MOK**

The Associated Press

ANGEL ISLAND — Li Keng Wong remembers the bars on the windows and the locked doors that closed behind her when she first arrived at Angel Island.

"I was 7 at the time, and even at that young age, I asked why we were being locked up," Wong said. "I asked my mother, 'Mommy, why are we in jail?'"

Wong, 73, was one of thousands of immigrants from southern China who were detained at the Angel Island Immigration Station between 1910 and 1940.

The National Trust for Historic Preservation on Monday named the station to its 1999 list of 11 most-endangered places, supporting the effort to restore the station for future visitors — and perhaps shed light on Wong's childhood question.

"We would like Angel Island to be seen with the same appreciation as Ellis Island," said Felecia Lowe, president of the Angel Island Immigration Station Foundation, which has been working for 25 years to preserve and restore the station.

Recognition from the Trust for Historic Preservation will support the campaign to turn the Angel Island station into a West Coast version of the immigration muse-

um on Ellis Island in New York Harbor, said Lowe, a San Francisco filmmaker whose father was detained at the station.

Angel Island has not received the same attention as Ellis Island, because "it's a difficult story to tell," Lowe said. "It's not part of the dominant mythology."

About 1 million immigrants were processed at Angel Island while it was in operation. The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 barred Chinese laborers from entering the United States until the act was repealed in 1943, so Chinese immigrants were routinely detained and interrogated on the island, which sits in San Francisco Bay.

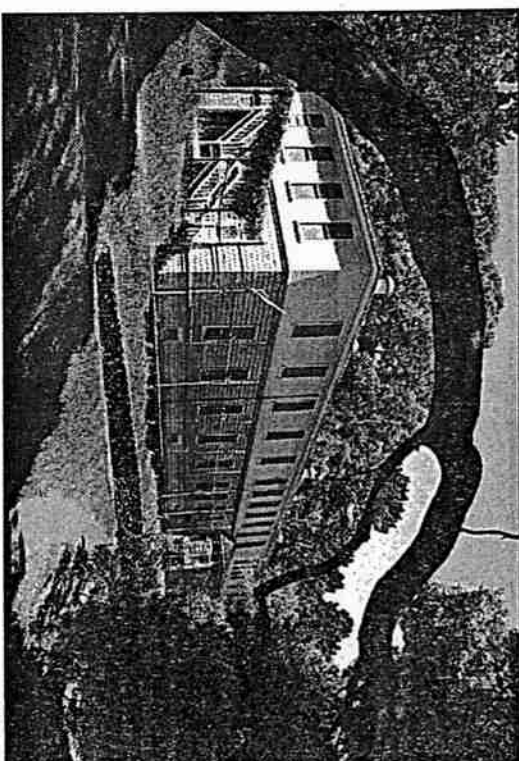
About 175,000 Chinese immigrants were held at the station for anywhere from a few days to two months. During World War II, the station was used as a prisoner-of-war camp.

On Monday, Nancy Fung, 60, made her first trip back to Angel Island since being held there with her mother for a week in 1939.

"After all these years, I still remember," she said after looking at the bunks and broken sinks in the barracks. She would like to see the station turned into a museum so her grandchildren and others in younger generations will remember as well.

"Sometimes if you just tell people something, they won't believe it," Fung said. "They won't believe there is prejudice until they see something like this."

The station is now part of Angel Island State Park, and the barracks



AP photo

LANDMARK: The barracks of the Angel Island Immigration Station, shown last week, is where immigrants waited to be processed before entering the United States. The station, in San Francisco Bay, was named a national historic landmark in 1997.

is open to visitors. Only minimal repairs have been made since the military closed the station in 1947.

The station hospital is dilapidated, with a cracking foundation and crumbling walls. It could take \$10 million just to repair the buildings, park Superintendent Nicholas Franco said.

In September, Congress adopted legislation by Sen. Daniel Akaka, D-Hawaii, to spend \$100,000 on a feasibility study to restore the station and turn it into a museum. The station was designated a national landmark in 1997.

Among the highlights of a station tour are the poems etched into the

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— **Nancy Fung,**
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walls of the barracks, expressing hope for a better life in the United States but despair at being locked away like prisoners. The foundation would like to restore the etchings, which have been painted over, to make them more visible.

Other plans call for rebuilding the original pier, restoring the hospital and rebuilding the administration building, which was destroyed by fire in 1940 and was where interrogations took place. The idea is to allow visitors to experience what it was like for immigrants going through the station.

■ Drugstore chains destroying landmarks, group says.