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On the cover: Please see page 36. (St. Louis Mercantile Library.)

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To the Chinese Americans in St. Louis,
whose struggle and success have inspired this book.

Contents

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Some information in this book is derived from my book *Chinese St. Louis: From Enclave to Cultural Community* published by Temple University Press in 2004. Interested readers may consult the latter for more expansive information on Chinese Americans in St. Louis.

My family has been the most steadfast support of my long-term research on Chinese Americans. I am forever indebted to them.

INTRODUCTION

In 1857, Alla Lee, a 24-year-old native of Ningbo, China, seeking a better life, came to St. Louis, where he opened a small shop on North Tenth Street selling tea and coffee. Lee first arrived in California as interpreter of a missionary. With the assistance of church and business networks, Lee traveled to the East Coast, and in 1857 arrived in St. Louis. A decade later, Lee was joined by several hundred of his countrymen from San Francisco and New York who were seeking jobs in mines and factories in and around St. Louis. The stories of Lee and the Chinese workers reflect an important factor in the early Chinese settlement in St. Louis: many were migrants who sought opportunities in other parts of the country when their situations deteriorated in California. The rather hostile socioeconomic climate in the United States forced these immigrants to keep moving to survive. Their paths to the Mound City, St. Louis's nickname as the earlier Native American inhabitants left many enormous burial mounds nearby, were largely determined by religious connections, recruitment efforts of the capitalists, and kinship networks.

Most of these Chinese workers lived in boarding houses located near a small street called Hop Alley. In time, Chinese hand laundries, merchandise stores, herb shops, restaurants, and clan association headquarters sprang up in and around that street. In St. Louis, Hop Alley became synonymous with Chinatown. Hop Alley, like many Chinese communities in other parts of the country, has been stereotyped as a mysterious and dangerous place, often associated with opium dens, tong wars, and murder.

Despite prejudice and discrimination, Hop Alley survived with remarkable resilience and energy. St. Louis Chinatown was not simply a ghetto plagued by urban problems of crowded, unsanitary living and working conditions and crimes. In fact, it was a lively commercial, residential, and recreational center for the Chinese. The hand laundries, grocery stores, restaurants, and tea shops were essential businesses enabling the survival, and in some cases, remarkable success of the early Chinese settlers. These businesses, especially the hand laundries, were also indispensable to the larger St. Louis communities that readily utilized the much needed services. The elbow grease of the Chinese laundrymen certainly made the industrial machine of St. Louis run smoother and better. No matter how small the Chinese population became from time to time, its members contributed disproportionately—less than 0.1 percent of the total general population providing 60 percent of the laundry services for the city.

While the laundries provided services to the larger community, Chinese grocery stores, restaurants, and tea shops primarily sustained the survival of Chinese residents. The importance of these businesses not only lies in their supply of merchandise and services essential for the daily existence of the Chinese, but also in their absorption of Chinese immigrant laborers who

were excluded from the general labor market. Moreover, these businesses contributed to the metropolitan atmosphere that the city boosters were eagerly pursuing.

Like other urban Chinese immigrant communities, Hop Alley developed a self-protective and self-governing structure, the On Leong Merchants and Laborers Association, commonly known as On Leong. Since its founding in the beginning of the 20th century, it had been the dominant community organization in St. Louis Chinatown, serving as an unofficial local government of Chinese immigrants in America. A powerful economic force within the Chinese community, On Leong provided useful social services to its members and families.

The lack of family life among early Chinese immigrants had been used first as evidence of Chinese cultural peculiarity, sojourning mentality, and incapability for Americanization, and later as an excuse for Chinese exclusion. Hop Alley, however, depicts a different picture, in which Chinese family lives existed and many Chinese immigrants made efforts to settle and even assimilate into the host society. For those who had family and children, Hop Alley was their home and community. For those who could not have family with them due to Chinese exclusion laws, financial difficulties, and Chinese cultural restraints, Hop Alley was a necessary substitute for family life and an emotional outlet. Interactions with community members on Sundays restored the energy drained by a week of toil. Hop Alley, to a certain degree, normalized their "abnormal" immigrant life in America.

The postwar prosperity brought the urban renewal movement, which intended to improve the look of the city and further promote its economy. The urban renewal projects included the clearing and reconstruction of the downtown district that consequently dismantled Hop Alley, thus ending the history of the century-old Chinatown in 1966.

The decades of the 1960s to 1980s saw two major shifts take place among the Chinese St. Louisans. The first was the transformation of Chinese from the predominantly Chinatown residents to suburban dwellers scattering throughout West County, the suburban municipalities west of the city. Meanwhile, the continued urban removal movement thwarted the community's effort to construct a new Chinatown. The Chinese professionals, either new arrivals or American-born, also found less dependence, both occupationally and recreationally, on an ethnic commercial and residential district. Also the Chinese economy changed from laundry business to food service and related retailing industries. At the same time, the professional Chinese were employed by the mainstream economy.

Although the Chinese population in St. Louis has increased substantially, one cannot easily spot either a commercial or residential Chinese district. Signs of Chinese American presence, however, are clear. More than half of the city's modern buildings and structures have involved the engineering design of a Chinese American consulting firm, William Tao and Associates. Two weekly Chinese language newspapers vie to serve the community. Three Chinese language schools offer classes of Chinese language, arts, and culture. A dozen Chinese religious institutions have substantial memberships. More than 40 community organizations independently or jointly sponsor a wide array of community activities ranging from cultural gatherings to the annual Chinese Culture Days held in the Missouri Botanical Gardens that draws more than 10,000 visitors. More than 500 Chinese restaurants cater to the St. Louisans who are fond of ethnic cuisine.

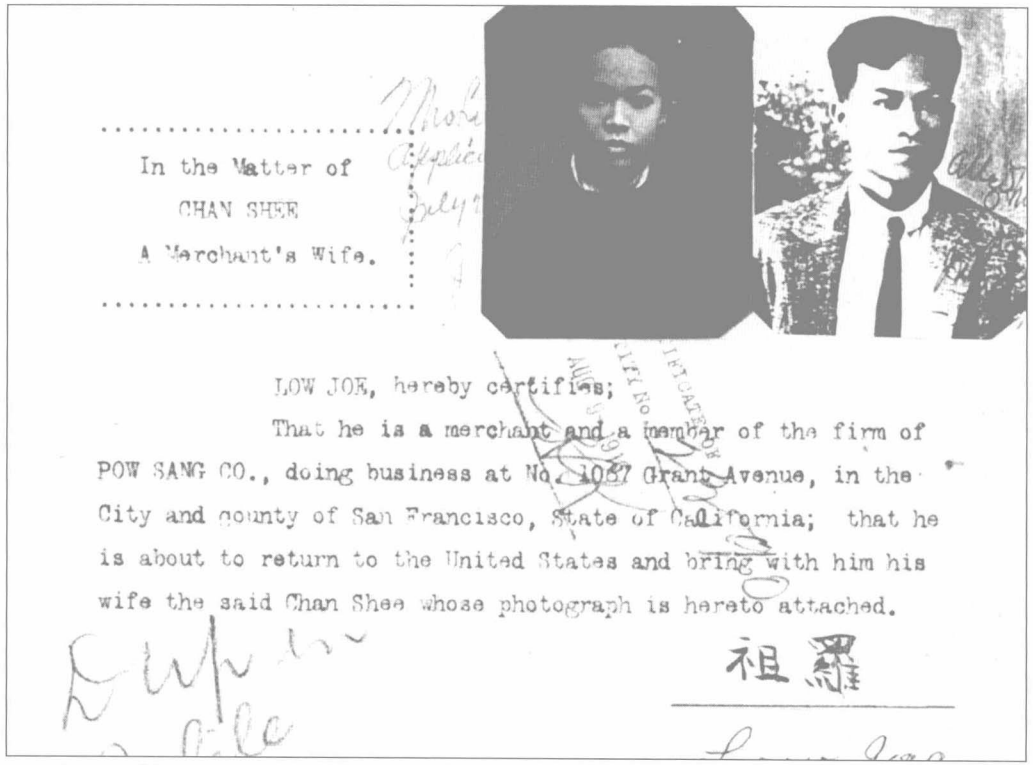
The establishment and development of Chinese community organizations, Chinese churches, and Chinese language schools between the 1960s and 1980s signified the formation of a Chinese American cultural community in St. Louis. Without physical boundaries, the cultural community proves to be a functional, cohesive, and tightly knit ethnic community structure. Without geographical concentrations, the myriad community organizations and cultural institutions have created a visible and indispensable ethnic community. Through its wide array of activities and events, the cultural community effectively bound its members together and rendered them invaluable social and emotional services. The cultural community has exhibited an alternative ethnic community model when a physical ethnic concentration is absent and a geographical ethnic community is difficult to construct.

One

COMING TO AMERICA

The 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act banned the entry of Chinese laborers while it exempted Chinese merchants. Some Chinese laborers, in order to bring their families to America, changed their status from laborer to merchant by faking a partnership in a grocery store. Others were smuggled by train or boat from Canada, Mexico, and the Caribbean. Immigration authorities responded by assuming all Chinese immigrants were guilty of fraudulent entry until proven otherwise and singled them out for prolonged detention and interrogation at entry points. During the period when the Angel Island Immigration Station was operating (1910–1940), immigration officials climbed aboard and inspected the passengers' documents each time a ship arrived in San Francisco. They allowed those with satisfactory papers to go ashore. The remainder were transferred to a small steamer and ferried to the immigration station on Angel Island to await hearings on their application for entry. Although a few whites and other Asians were held at the detention center, the majority of the detainees were Chinese. The immigration detention center on Angel Island was a two-story wooden structure, where men and women were held separately. The duration of imprisonment was often months. Immigrants were first taken to a hospital for medical examinations. Those afflicted with parasitic diseases such as trachoma, hookworm, and liver fluke were excluded and deported. The rest were sent back to their dormitories to await the hearing on their application. Regardless of the validity of the Chinese arrival's legal documents for entry, a Chinese woman had to go through an extensive cross-interrogation on family, home life, and native village. An applicant's testimony could largely determine the result of his or her application. Under such practice, a felon could gain admission as long as he or she and the witnesses were prepared to produce the same testimony, while a bona fide applicant could be denied if he or she failed to provide expected testimony.

Since the mid-19th century, the natural disasters and internal upheaval in China pushed hundreds of thousands of Chinese immigrants to leave their wives and children behind and sail overseas. The discovery of gold in California in 1848 and the construction of the Transcontinental Railroad in 1869 also lured the Chinese laborers to come to America in search of fortunes, thus being called *Gam Saan Haak*, or "gold mountain guest." Pictured in 1918 are Young Ng She and Young Sum Wood, wife and child of Chinese merchant Young Hoy of Hawaii. (National Archives-Pacific Sierra Region, San Bruno, California.)



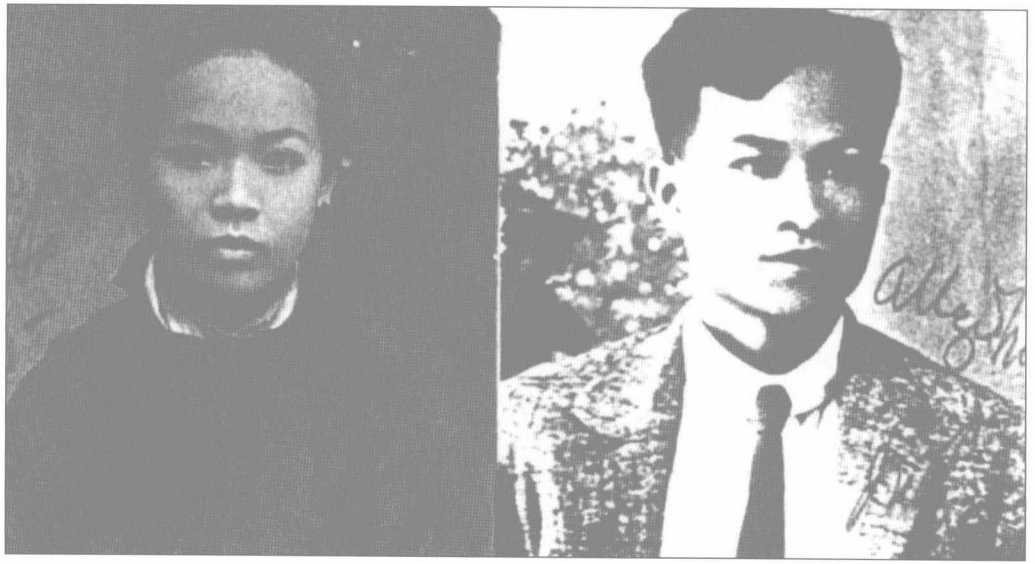
In the Matter of
CHAN SHEE
A Merchant's Wife.

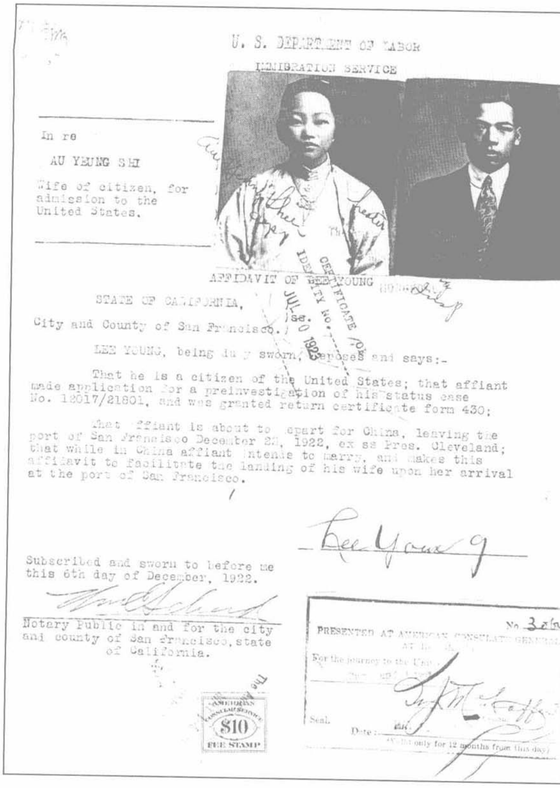
LOW JOE, hereby certifies;

That he is a merchant and a member of the firm of POW SANG CO., doing business at No. 1037 Grant Avenue, in the City and county of San Francisco, State of California; that he is about to return to the United States and bring with him his wife the said Chan Shee whose photograph is hereto attached.

祖爨

Low Joe, a Chinese merchant living and working in San Francisco, is pictured with his wife Chan Shee in 1916. The 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act prohibited the entry of Chinese laborers but exempted Chinese merchants and U.S. citizens. All Chinese immigrants had to provide documentation indicating their status as merchants or family members of merchants or U.S. citizens. As indicated here, when the couple entered the United States, Low Joe had to present to the immigration authorities a certificate to prove his merchant status in order to apply for admission of his wife to America. (National Archives-Pacific Sierra Region, San Bruno, California.)





U. S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR
IMMIGRATION SERVICE

In re
AU YEUNG SHI
Wife of citizen, for admission to the United States.

AFFIDAVIT OF LEE YOUNG

STATE OF CALIFORNIA,
City and County of San Francisco.) ss.

LEE YOUNG, being duly sworn, deposes and says:-

That he is a citizen of the United States; that affiant made application for a preinvestigation of his status case No. 12017/21801, and was granted return certificate form 430;

That affiant is about to depart for China, leaving the port of San Francisco December 22, 1922, ex ss Pres. Cleveland; that while in China affiant intends to marry, and makes this affidavit to facilitate the landing of his wife upon her arrival at the port of San Francisco.

Lee Young

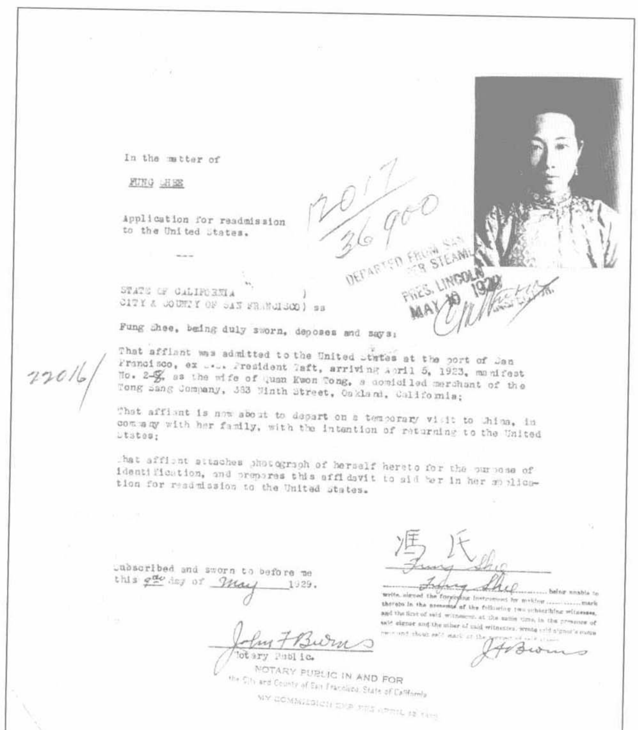
Subscribed and sworn to before me this 6th day of December, 1922.

Notary Public in and for the city and county of San Francisco, state of California.

PRESENTED AT AMERICAN CONSULATE GENERAL
For the journey to the United States
Seal.
Date
(Valid only for 12 months from this day)

$10 FEE STAMP

Lee Young, a U.S. citizen, is pictured with his wife, Au Yeung Shi, in 1923. Due to the uneven gender ratio, many America-born Chinese males had to go to their ancestral land for brides. In December 1922, Lee Young left for China to marry his bride there and returned to the United States the following year. To ensure the entry of his bride, Lee Young had to obtain an affidavit to prove his citizenship prior to his departure for China. (National Archives-Pacific Sierra Region, San Bruno, California.)



In the matter of
FUNG SHEE
Application for readmission to the United States.

12017
36900

DEPARTED FROM SAN FRANCISCO PER STEAMER PRES. LINCOLN MAY 10 1929

STATE OF CALIFORNIA)
CITY & COUNTY OF SAN FRANCISCO) ss

Fung Shee, being duly sworn, deposes and says:

That affiant was admitted to the United States at the port of San Francisco, ex S.S. President Taft, arriving April 5, 1923, manifest No. 2-8, as the wife of Quan Kwon Tong, a domiciled merchant of the Tong Sang Company, 363 Ninth Street, Oakland, California;

That affiant is now about to depart on a temporary visit to China, in company with her family, with the intention of returning to the United States;

That affiant attaches photograph of herself hereto for the purpose of identification, and prepares this affidavit to aid her in her application for readmission to the United States.

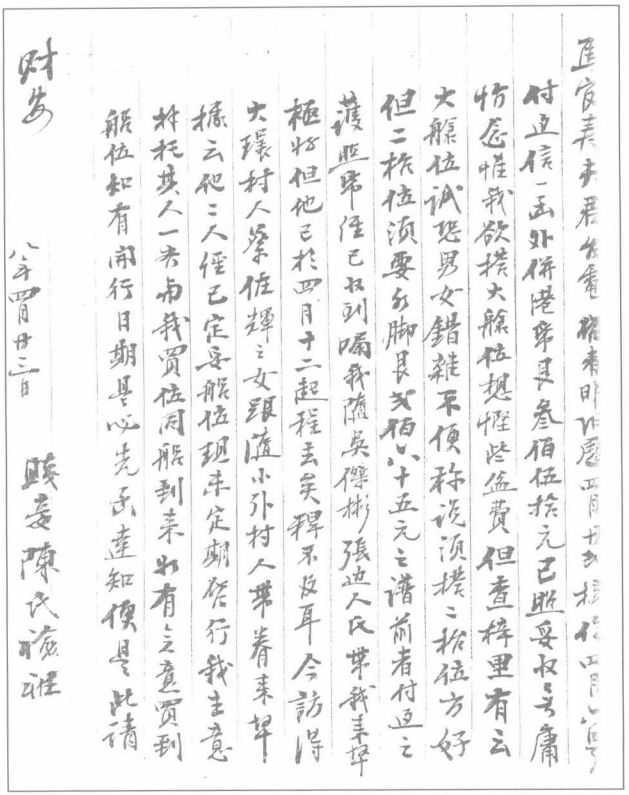
馮氏
Fung Shee

Subscribed and sworn to before me this 2nd day of May 1929.

John F Burns
Notary Public.
NOTARY PUBLIC IN AND FOR the City and County of San Francisco, State of California

Fung Shee, wife of Quan Kwon Tong, a Chinese merchant at the Tong Sang Company in San Francisco, came to join her husband from China in 1923. In 1929, she went to China for a visit but had to apply for her readmission to the United States prior to her departure for China. (National Archives-Pacific Sierra Region, San Bruno, California.)

The strong desire for family reunions and hope for a better life encouraged many Chinese women to overcome traditional ideologies that prohibited a women from leaving their home village and the physical handicap of bound feet to sail across the Pacific Ocean to join their husbands in America. The money made by the Gam Saan Haak in America was remitted home to enable the wife to purchase a ticket for a steamship. The image here shows a money order of $350 mailed by Chinese immigrant Kun Shau Ma to his wife, Chan Shee, in Hong Kong on April 8, 1919. (National Archives-Pacific Sierra Region, San Bruno, California.)



This is the original letter from Chan Shee to her husband, Kun Shau Ma, in Chinese and its English translation, dated April 23, 1919. The passage from Hong Kong to the Pacific West Coast of America was lengthy and difficult. Most Chinese immigrants purchased third- or steerage-class tickets and endured odor, crowdedness, and seasickness for over a month. However, what waited for them ahead was more uncertainty and hardship. (National Archives-Pacific Sierra Region, San Bruno, California.)

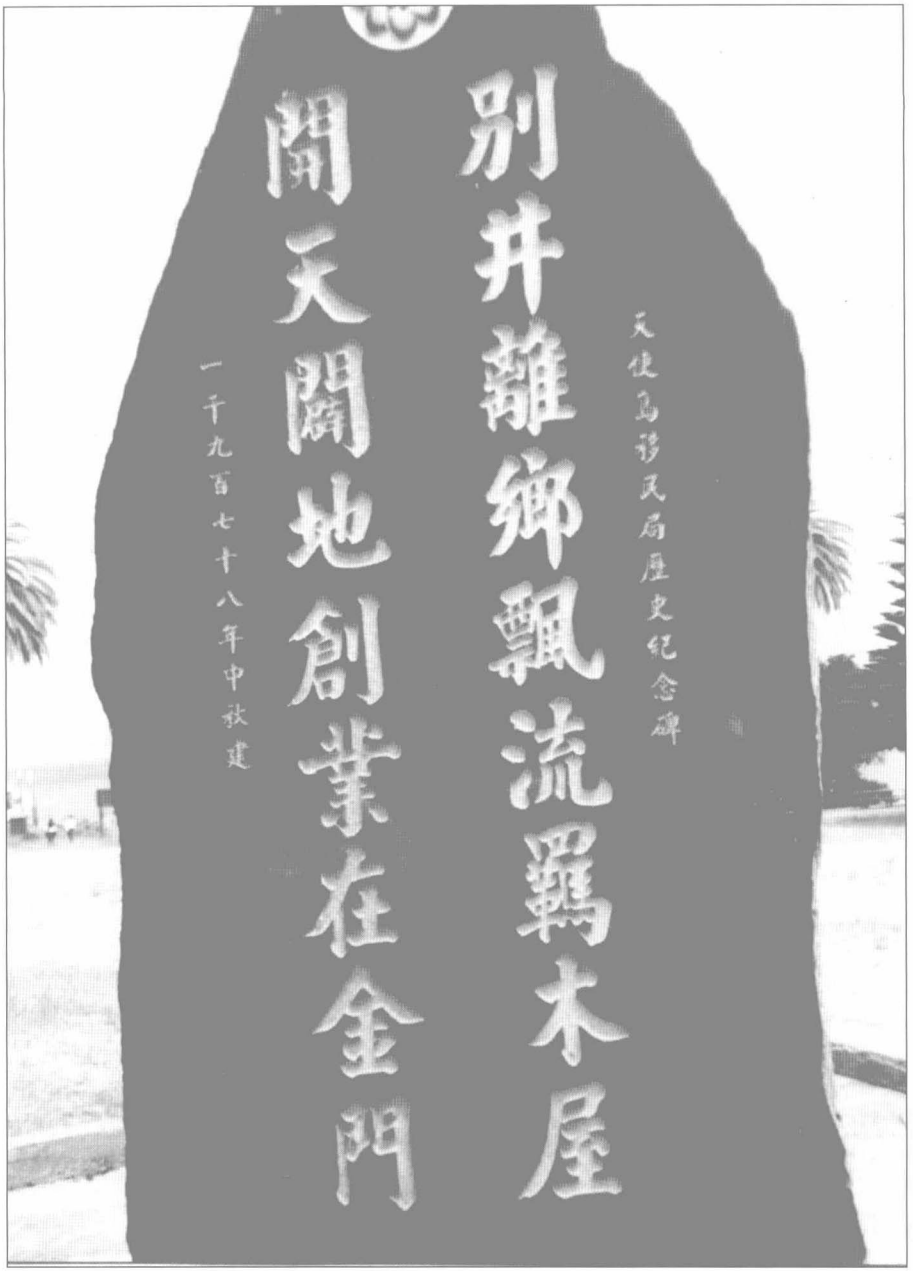
April 23, 1919

Dear Huuband,
Mr. Kun Shau.

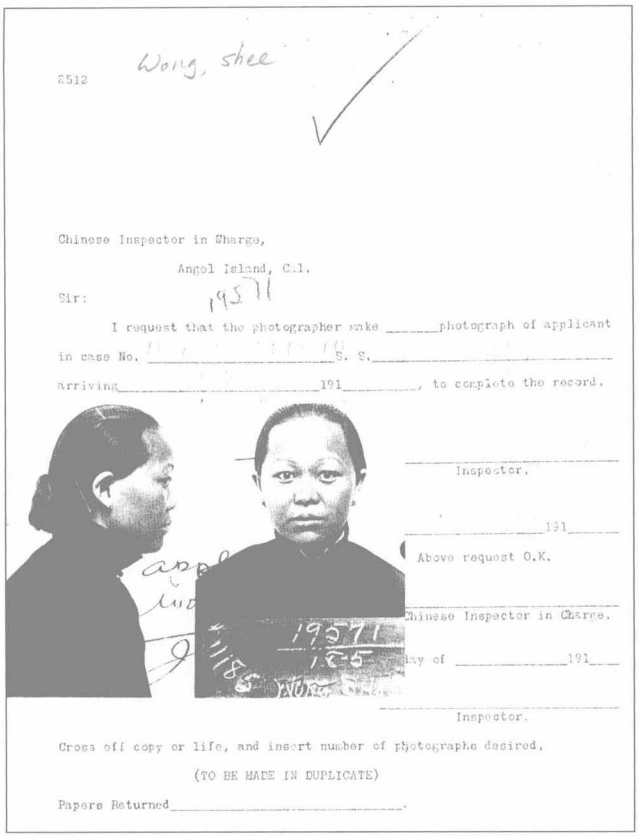
Received your letter of the April 6th. and Hongkong money paper $350.00 on the date of April 22 in Chinese calendar. I desire to take the third class ticket, for it cost little money, but I heard someone said third class is not very comfortable for lady. and it is better to take the second class. It shoud cost about $265.00, I has received the passport and glad come with Ng Get Bun, but he sail on April 12. I know that Choy Jor Fay's girl of the Tai Wan village come with a man and his farmily of the Shew Yan village. The two men has been ordered steamship ticket. but did't know whan the time for sail. I beg them to buy a ticket for me and come with them on the same steamer. If I has my ticket, and know what day does the steamer sail. I will write you and let you know.

Your Wife,

Chan Shee.



This plaque in front of the immigrant station on Angel Island was erected in 1978. The engraved Chinese characters say "Leaving home behind and being detained in wooden shed, looking for new life by the Golden Gate" (translation by author). The Angle Island Immigrant Station was in operation from 1910 to 1940. It was called the Ellis Island of the West, in comparison with Ellis Island located on Hudson River that processed European immigrants. The two immigration stations differed in their specific functions. While Ellis Island was merely a way station, as the processing of a vast majority of European immigrants took only between three to five hours, Angle Island was set up as a detention center for Asian, mainly Chinese, immigrants. (Photograph by Huping Ling.)


2512 Wong, shee

Chinese Inspector in Charge,

Angel Island, Cal.

Sir: 19571

I request that the photographer make _____photograph of applicant in case No. _____S. S._____

Arriving_____191_____, to complete the record.

_____

Inspector.

_____191_____

Above request O.K.

_____

Chinese Inspector in Charge.

_____day of _____191___

_____

Inspector.

Cross off copy or life, and insert number of photographs desired.

(TO BE MADE IN DUPLICATE)

Papers Returned_____.

At the immigrant station, an immigrant was photographed and given a case number as indicated in the images. An immigrant family was split as men and women were detained in separated quarters for cross interrogation. (National Archives-Pacific Sierra Region, San Bruno, California.)