



Angel Island's Long and Varied History
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This photo, taken some time in the late 19th century shows a glorious winter sunrise over Angel Island as seen from the hills above Sausalito. The tip of the Tiburon Peninsula can be seen at the far left. Angel Island received its name in 1775 when Juan Manuel de Ayala of Spain sailed into the bay and anchored on the large island that he would name, Isla de Los Angeles. The cove where his ship berthed now bears his name, Ayala Cove. The uninhabited island had been a hunting and fishing ground for the Coast Miwok tribe for many generations. Thirty years later, in 1814, the British sloop, *HMS Raccoon*, was repaired on the beach at Ayala Cove and the deep-water channel between the island and Tiburon became known as Raccoon Strait.

During the Mexican land-grant era, Angel Island was used for cattle ranching. In 1850, shortly after the Mexican-American War, the island became a U.S. military preserve. During the Civil War, soldiers from nearby Fort Point constructed Camp Reynolds, the first permanent military installation on the island. In addition to providing troops to guard the entrance of the bay from Confederate naval ships, the garrison also took part in bloody campaigns against Native-American tribes all over the Western United States. In 1891 the Army changed the name of the post to Fort McDowell and a quarantine station for ships entering San Francisco Bay was built.

In the early twentieth century, Chinese immigrants to San Francisco were interred there for quarantine purposes and to prove that they had certificates from the Chinese government allowing them entry into the United States. The isolationist inspired Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 prohibited, “both skilled and unskilled laborers and Chinese employed in mining” from entering the United States. The Immigration Station became known as “the Ellis Island of the West.” More than 175,000 Chinese and Asian immigrants were interred there anywhere from a few weeks to more than two years before being granted immigration status or deported. The Chinese Exclusion Act was repealed in 1943 but it was not until the early 1960s that all racial and country-of-origin barriers were removed from U.S. law.

During both World War I and II, Fort McDowell served as a training depot for the Army and as a processing center for German, Japanese and Italian POW’s. At the end of World War II, it was also used as a decommissioning station for U.S. soldiers coming home from the Pacific. The last military use of the island was during the 1950s Cold War when a Nike Missile base was built that was only operational for eight years. In 1955, Ayala Cove was purchased by the California State Park System and by 1962 all military operations on the island ended. The entire island was given over to the State of California and the Angel Island Immigration Station is now a federally designated National Historic Landmark. Today, the island’s sheltered harbor, hiking trails, magnificent views and historical significance welcome tens of thousands of visitors each year.

[July 18, 2023]

Photo ID no. P1999.73