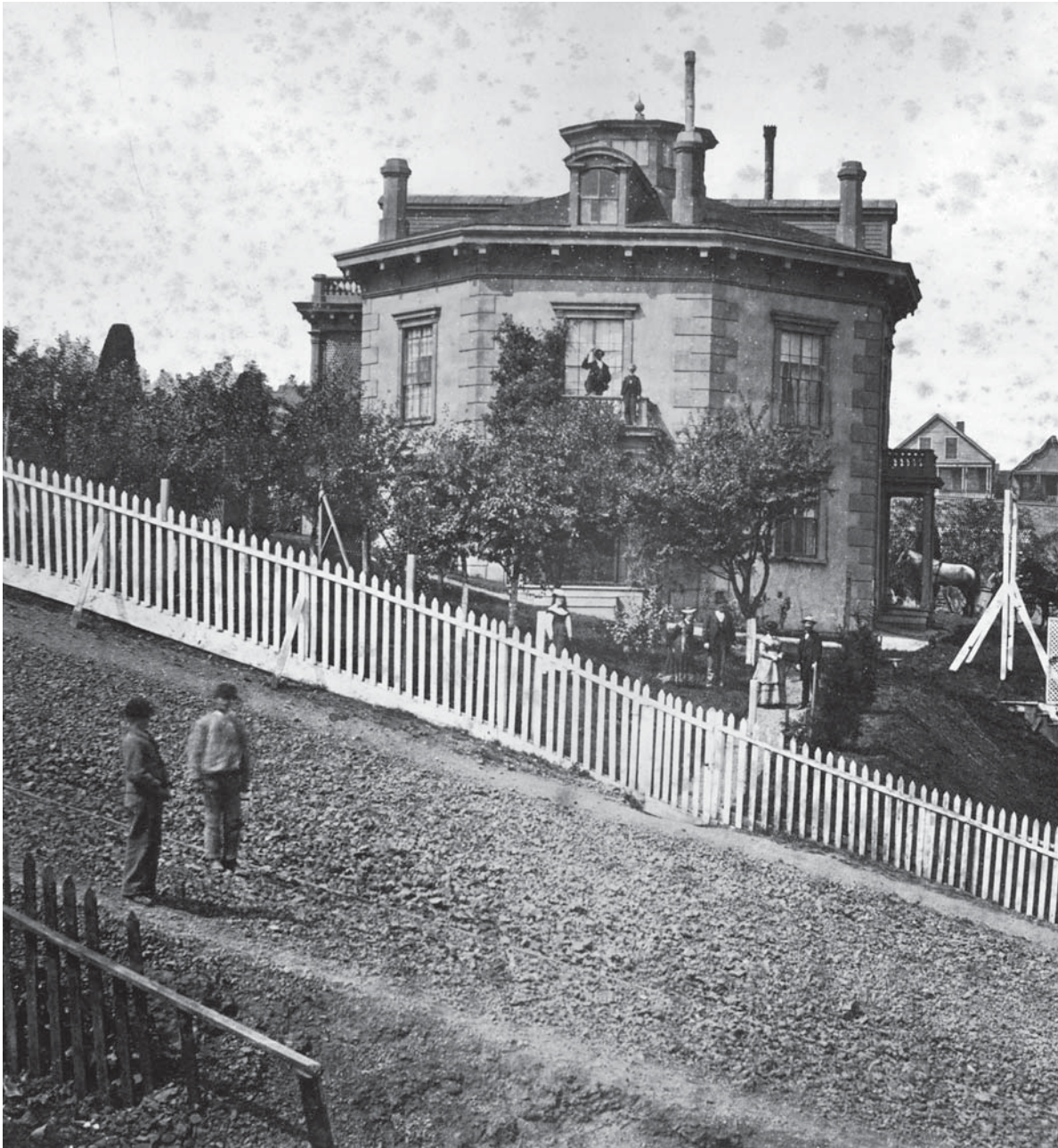


# THE ARGONAUT

JOURNAL OF THE SAN FRANCISCO MUSEUM AND HISTORICAL SOCIETY



# THE ARGONAUT

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*Journal of the San Francisco Museum and Historical Society*

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# DEACONESS KATHARINE MAURER:

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*“A First-class Favourite Anytime”<sup>1</sup>*

by Maria Sakovich

*Kuan Yin, Ho Sum! (Goddess of Mercy, you are very kind.) —Wong Lee<sup>2</sup>*

*There never was or never will be fashioned a pen that could adequately record your wondrous influence for good among us. Only the recording Angel is qualified to set down the work of your ministry here in this vale of tears.... —A detained European man<sup>3</sup>*

Referred to as Missy Ma-lo, ABC Mama, the Angel of Angel Island, and even as Kuan Yin (the Goddess of Mercy), Katharine Rebecca Maurer ministered to thousands of sojourners—immigrants and travelers—at the Angel Island Immigration Station. The San Francisco Directory listed her occupation over time as deaconess, missionary, evangelist, and social worker, all appropriate descriptions for the work she performed for nearly forty years—almost 29 years at the island station and 11 at the later mainland locations. Appreciated and beloved by people of all nationalities, by poor and not-so-poor alike, Deaconess Maurer occupies a special place in the history of the immigration station. To some extent this special place has made Maurer a bit of a legend. While she may seem very familiar in the Angel Island milieu and within Methodist circles, there is much about her that we do not know. Although during her lifetime her work was recognized within the local sphere, her place

within the larger contexts of both immigration history and Protestant church history have been overlooked.<sup>4</sup> The facts of her rural German Canadian upbringing have not been explored for possible connections to her missionary and social work among Asian and non-Asian immigrants in an urban setting.

Almost immediately, investigation of the woman and the work behind the legend runs into problems. One is the nature of the information about the deaconess and her activities. Another is lack of information. While local newspapers and Methodist publications as well as Maurer herself periodically wrote about her work, these sources, for the most part, convey a superficial, though colorful, picture of her daily tasks. Most of the reports were written to convince Methodist readers of the importance of the work at Angel Island and to solicit their financial support and personal involvement.<sup>5</sup> A potentially important trove of documentation, the deaconess's papers, which filled a “small trunk and a suitcase,” have not survived. According to Frances Maurer Schneider, a niece, Maurer felt strongly that the confidences people shared with her needed to be protected, hence the request to destroy her papers.<sup>6</sup> It is possible, however, with a close reading of the reports and correspondence which does exist and with some sleuthing about her family origins, to augment the legend with context and to reveal some of the person that evoked such respect and high regard.



*Deaconess Maurer and her assistant Eleanor Schoeraff (on the right) holding two of the youngest of the detained population. Mrs. Schoeraff worked (and lived) with Maurer from 1924 until her death in 1933. Courtesy of California State Parks.*

When the San Francisco Commissioner acquiesced a year after the immigration station opened (in 1910) to the request by the local Methodist Woman's Home Missionary Society to place a deaconess at the station to care for the needs of the Japanese women entering the country as picture brides, he was both following a precedent first established at Castle Garden (the forerunner to New York's Ellis Island) and acknowledging

the earlier role of the Methodist church in rendering aid to these women in San Francisco.

In order to reduce the exploitation of arriving immigrants by swindlers, disreputable lawyers, and others wanting to profit from ignorant newcomers, missionaries of several religious denominations and representatives of immigrant benevolent societies were allowed to offer services to needy and distressed immigrants at Castle



*Deaconess Maurer with children "of whom there is always a large number at the station."  
She provided them with toys, books, games, and loving attention. Courtesy of California State Parks.*

Garden. Though eventual federal government regulation of immigrant processing reduced the abuse, the help of outside agencies became an established feature at New York's first receiving center and continued at Ellis Island. Eventually benevolent societies became active advocates on behalf of immigrants who were detained or refused entry, and representatives worked to alter the outcome of their cases. Missionary societies offered temporary shelter, help in locating resident family members, information about employment, and a safe haven for single women.<sup>7</sup>

In San Francisco before the immigration station existed, newly arrived non-citizens who could not be landed immediately (mostly Chinese

men and boys) were confined to an inadequate building at Meigg's Wharf. With the arrival of considerable numbers of Japanese women, permission was granted for them to wait at the Methodist Ellen Stark Home for their processing to be completed and their new husbands to appear. This practice ceased with the opening of the immigration station at Angel Island. In order to continue helping the Japanese women, however, the Methodist bureau secretary of Japanese work requested that a deaconess be allowed to visit the station.<sup>8</sup> Very quickly the work performed by the first deaconess, Carrie Isabel Pierson, expanded to include services to all detained immigrants.



*General view of the Angel Island Immigration. The large building in the foreground was the administration building, with female detention quarters at the second floor center. On the hill, the male detention quarters sat on the right and the station hospital on the left. The baggage storeroom and lighthouse equipment stood on the wharf. The line of cottages in the rear was for employees who provided daily services. Courtesy of the Records of the Mission Education and Cultivation Program Department, General Board of Global Ministries, United Methodist Church Archives, GCAH, Madison, New Jersey.*

Within a few years after Katharine Maurer replaced Deaconess Pierson in 1912, other organizations joined the Methodist Woman's Home Missionary Society in their efforts to help those detained at Angel Island Station. Until 1924, when the final quota law was enacted and the number of immigrants coming to the United States was greatly reduced, the Chinese YMCA, Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, International Institute, Japanese Association of America, Japanese YWCA, Korean National Association, National Council of Jewish Women, Travelers' Aid Society, and the YWCA, as well as individuals from ethnic communities (including my grandfather, a Russian Orthodox priest in San

Francisco) provided a variety of services. In 1924, Maurer was joined by an assistant, Mrs. Eleanor Schoeraff, who remained until her death in 1933. By 1935, Maurer seemed to be the chief social or welfare worker "through whom all other organizations and individuals work[ed] in their contacts with this office."<sup>9</sup> In 1940 the District Director noted that "she has been able to carry on this work in behalf of other organizations so that ... we have not been faced with the problem of dealing with various individuals representing various organizations..."<sup>10</sup> From early on, unlike the others, however, Deaconess Maurer occupied two rooms in the administration building and she was allowed to visit freely among the detained—the



men in the so-called detention building and the women on the upper floor of the administration building.<sup>11</sup>

Another distinction between Maurer and the representatives of these organizations was in the nature of the work. While the latter aimed, for the most part, to make detainees stay at the immigration station as short as possible by actively advocating to reverse denied entries, the deaconess strived to make the period of detention as comfortable as possible physically, psychologically, and even spiritually. Though seldom involved in detainees' cases, she did sometimes act as interpreter for German and Yiddish speakers and acted as witness in marriage ceremonies as required by immigration officials, and on occasion she also took responsibility for people paroled to her (for example, the Athanesatos family from Greece and Adele Limwerk, a young woman from Baltic Russia).<sup>12</sup> Maurer, however, became frequently active in detainees' lives after their release from detention.

*Social Worker. A little crumpled note...lay on the desk of the deaconess: 'Dear Miss Maurer—me and Max want to see you. Steven.' ... There were other letters—requests for handwork, needed clothing; interviews to discuss personal problems—'would Miss Maurer give them a little time.'*<sup>13</sup>

As the station's chief welfare or social worker, Maurer's work was multifaceted, mundane, and of enormous comfort to those on the receiving end.<sup>14</sup> Paraphrasing her own words—she fulfilled needs.<sup>15</sup> She provided clothing and she went shopping. One shopping list, probably for some of the German alien enemies detained in 1917, included a razor; two dozen clothes pins, some guitar strings, two Fritz Kreisler records, a toothbrush and three tubes of toothpaste, ink, and a pocket knife.<sup>16</sup> She brought flowers (as many as 653 bouquets in 1915-1916) along with caring words to those she visited in the station hospital.<sup>17</sup> Maurer established a library during her first year; later she collected materials to



*A young Japanese couple appearing before a Board of Special Inquiry, 1916. Any questions about applicants' eligibility to enter the country resulted in a hearing before the board. Courtesy of California State Parks.*

keep detainees busy with sewing, weaving, knitting, and woodcarving. She also provided instruction in English, in American customs, and in practical matters such as ironing clothes.

In addition to taking care of detainees' immediate needs, Maurer offered psychological support and counsel. During her first year at the station she noted that "sometimes I feel that the carrying of sunshine and cheer and comfort and inspiration forms the major part of my work...."<sup>18</sup> The letters and poems of thanks which have survived attest to the deep gratitude of the writers for her "goodness and kindness ... to [the] many brokenhearted people."<sup>19</sup> One journalist described her office as "a sort of sanctuary in no man's land."<sup>20</sup> Her therapeutic skills, acquired when the social work profession was new and most likely enhanced through her years of experience, would still be effective today. Maurer recognized that "often in an interview there is little one can do except listen, without trying to comfort, without trying to give any thing, just helping to bring about that release which comes from sharing troubles, and sometimes in the telling one finds the solution."<sup>21</sup> Some of those detained left transformed by their encounter with the deaconess.



*Deaconess Maurer established the library in 1913 and relied on donations "in any language." In 1936 she wrote, "The library is a very popular place for everyone." Courtesy of the Records of the Mission Education and Cultivation Program Department, General Board of Global Ministries, United Methodist Church Archives, GCAH, Madison, New Jersey.*

Maurer's work did not finish when she caught the last ferry boat at 4:30 back to San Francisco. She visited newly settling immigrants in their homes, and many, including Chinese and Japanese, made their way to her apartment, "finding there the help or encouragement needed."<sup>22</sup> (After 1921 Maurer lived in Chinatown at 940 Washington Street, the Methodist Chinese



*The Angel Island ferry brought new arrivals and employees to and from the station, making four round-trips every day, forty-five minutes each way. “One German woman commented, ‘Our day begins when we see Miss Maurer get off the boat.’”  
Courtesy of the Records of the Mission Education and Cultivation Program Department, General Board of Global Ministries, United Methodist Church Archives, GCAH, Madison, New Jersey.*

Home—or within easy walking distance of the home at 655 Stockton and 1441 Jones.) “I do as much follow-up work as I can,” she said in 1933, “keeping in touch...and getting them connections with the right organizations.”<sup>23</sup> These “friendly visits” (as early casework was called) would not only have afforded her an occasion, in today’s terms, to assess needs, but also to carry out her “Americanization” work.

If we can accurately deduce Maurer’s views from one speech (or essay) that she called “Americanization” (written in about 1920), she seems to have subscribed to what historian John Higham described as the more humanitarian strain of the movement that began as an effort in the late nineteenth century to ease new immigrants’ way into American society.<sup>24</sup> War in Europe and American entry into that war (in 1917) transformed this basically assimilative process into a more coercive attempt based on patriotic principles to ensure loyalty. Writing and speaking in the

atmosphere of the even more fervent attempts during the post-war Red Scare to squelch radicalism among foreigners, Maurer steered a course that integrated an understanding of the difficulties of immigrant life and the perceived need for national unity. She stated that not only war-time America had required a unified nation, but more importantly, a fully operational democracy afterwards required a “spirit of harmonious purpose and mutual understanding.”<sup>25</sup> She understood that communities of immigrants who lived separate from the mainstream, did not speak English, and were unfamiliar with much of American life could not participate in the democratic process. She particularly understood the isolation that foreign mothers might feel—“with no understanding [and] no companionship” offered by native-born neighbors.<sup>26</sup> While the teaching (and learning) of English was important, so was the “friendly, sympathetic visitation,” an act that she performed frequently and recommended to others, as well.<sup>27</sup>

Evangelist. *“Even if I am not allowed to land and must return to my country [probably India or Afghanistan] I want to show your picture to my people and tell them you are the missionary who shows the people at Angel Island the way to God.”*<sup>28</sup>

As a Methodist deaconess, Maurer actively proselytized Protestant Christianity at the federally operated immigration station with the sanction of the officials, most of whom, according to Maurer, were Roman Catholic.<sup>29</sup> Her evangelical activities ranged from the yearly Christmas and Easter celebrations and prayer services to the telling of Bible stories, the reading of Scripture to various groups, and the distribution of Gospels, Bibles—sometimes as many as 5,000 a year (1920-1921)—and specially prepared cards with “Scripture texts” translated into Chinese and other languages. Since she acknowledged that “there is nothing more challenging and thrilling than to bring a human being to God,”<sup>30</sup> Maurer noted her pleasure when others indicated interest

in, or at least curiosity about, Christianity. She happily reported that a Japanese Shinto priestess (whom she had met at the station), who intended to teach Shintoism in California, had become “disappointed in Shintoism and wanted to study the Bible.”<sup>31</sup> And she “was greatly pleased to see the [Russian Jews] join us in our Easter services” and delighted to discover that one of the wards in the station hospital had been converted into a chapel for another Easter service.<sup>32</sup> The deaconess did not cover up her disappointment at non-Christian practices. On one occasion “paraphernalia that goes with idol worship—incense, candles, paper money full of little holes”—was found in the Chinese women’s section. “Had they really been worshiping their idols after all we had told them?” she asked.<sup>33</sup>

Though the deaconess did have a captive audience and her desire was fervent, conversion was not required for her services. Her ministry extended to all in need, regardless of race or religion. Moreover, she must have recognized boundaries to



*Deaconess Maurer and unidentified men. Maurer related that “beautiful sweaters, belts, and bags are woven on hand looms. The station doctor speaks of it as ‘a fine piece of occupational therapy.’” Courtesy of California State Parks.*



*Deaconess Maurer with women on rooftop of administration building. Quarters for detained women and their children were on the second floor of this building. Courtesy of California State Parks.*



*Deaconess Maurer and a group of Asian and European women gathered around a table for a lesson, ca. 1929. Courtesy of the Records of the Mission Education and Cultivation Program Department, General Board of Global Ministries, United Methodist Church Archives, GCAH, Madison, New Jersey.*

her evangelizing efforts. After 17 years working with her, San Francisco District Director Edward L. Haff observed in 1940 that “there has never been an occasion when she overstepped the bounds of a welfare worker.” He also noted her “exceptional tact and diplomacy.”<sup>34</sup> Presumably her evangelizing activities did not have to be curtailed, as were those of the American Tract Society at Ellis Island in 1905, when New York Commissioner Robert Watchorn restricted access to Jewish immigrants by missionaries who had been distributing Christian tracts written in Yiddish and Hebrew.<sup>35</sup> The comments of seven detained men at Angel Island do suggest a respect for other creeds. After the 1939 Christmas celebration at the immigration station, John Hunter, Sydney Gottesman, Daniel Carrasco, S. Lachman, Frank Farrel, Pedro Laguna, and Karl Karsten wrote “Your kindness and generosity as shown to us aliens...will be spoken of in many lands and your example will do much to spread *tolerance* and Christianity throughout the world.”<sup>36</sup>

Perhaps as important to Maurer as her evangelism was her belief in the inherent equality of people. “I am glad,” she told Methodist writer Eunice Jones Stickland in 1944, “I was taught as a child to love all people and God has given me reason to have faith in my fellow man, irrespective of nationality or creed.”<sup>37</sup> Attendance at the Evangelical North-Western College (now North Central College) probably strengthened these early teachings. Although founded by the North American Evangelical Association (a German-speaking church based on John Wesley’s Methodist teachings and practice) at the outbreak of the Civil War, North-Western was early influenced by the intellectual and moral climate of progressive Oberlin College, including a commitment to “aggressive leadership in crusading against ignorance, prejudice, injustice or any social evil of the day.”<sup>38</sup> In a 1931 talk at the Jubilee Meeting of the Woman’s Home Missionary Society, Maurer explained:



*Deaconess Maurer distributing devotional literature. Two of the detained men are identifiably Sikhs. As part of her missionary work, Maurer gave away gospels, Bibles—sometimes as many as 5,000 a year—tracts, and specially prepared cards with “Scripture texts.” She related her encounter with a Mr. H, whom she described as “a Mohammedan,” noting, “‘I like to talk about God,’ he said. ‘I have studied all our Eastern religions. I will gladly read this’ (in reference to St. John’s Gospel).*

*Courtesy of California State Parks.*

...I happen to belong to a group of women to whom nothing in life is alien; we minister to them all alike. I never fail to say in leaving, ‘Viva Con Dios,’ which means ‘Go with God’; and no one can be common or contemptible who goes with God. If you look at them through the eyes of God you will see real worth. So I think as I look at them that we all look pretty much the same to God; we are all his little foolish children.<sup>39</sup>

Although the immigration station at Angel Island was segregated, especially keeping Asians and Europeans from each other, fragments of evidence suggest that within this milieu, Maurer expressed or acted upon her belief. As she was “absolutely loyal to the government,”<sup>40</sup> she would not have rocked the boat, but it is interesting to read the following statement from a letter signed by fifteen European men in 1935 or 1936:



Photo taken by Deaconess Maurer and published in the *Annual Meeting Daily of the Woman's Home Missions*, October 28, 1920. Scan by Vincent Chin.  
 Courtesy of Judy Yung and Erika Lee.

“There are no nice discriminations,” they wrote. “Oriental and European are alike in your dear eyes.”<sup>41</sup> Over the years, on various occasions groups of “mixed” nationalities gathered under the auspices of the deaconess. In 1914, for example, she described the “kindergarten in the women’s quarters” (with mothers presumably close by) which included “a little Syrian girl, ... a little Jewish boy, some Italian, Spanish, Japanese, and Chinese boys and girls.”<sup>42</sup> At a later date she noted that “an afternoon in the library on book exchange day is like a seminar in human relationships. Many creeds and diversity of thought are represented, individual and world problems are discussed....”<sup>43</sup> Photographs document other occasions. One snapshot that Maurer took in about 1920 shows fourteen men—one each from Africa, Germany, Japan, India or Afghanistan, and Argentina; two from Russia and the others from

Samoa and other South Seas islands.<sup>44</sup> Another photo, probably from about 1929, shows Maurer and a group of Asian and European women gathered around a table for a lesson.<sup>45</sup> Prayer meetings and song services also brought diverse people together. It is not known whether the “mixed” Christmas celebrations that seem to have started in the 1930s were the product of a diminished population of detainees or an expressed desire of the deaconess. At Maurer’s apartment so numerous were the varied visitors that a young Jewish friend dubbed it “the international house of love.”<sup>46</sup>

*Deaconess. To minister to the poor, visit the sick, pray with the dying, care for the orphan, seek the wandering, comfort the sorrowing, save the sinning....*<sup>47</sup>

Dressed in the distinctive garb of the Methodist deaconess, Katharine Maurer represented Christian service at a time when Protestant churches sought to ameliorate conditions brought about by large-scale industrialization, migration from abroad and within the country, and growing urbanization. In the last two decades of the nineteenth century Protestant reformers began to envision a transformation of society based on principles of Jesus’s teaching. Among the activist churchwomen at the forefront of this emerging Social Gospel movement were Methodist women in Chicago, who were visiting immigrant neighborhoods to determine how to help the growing numbers of indigent urban dwellers. Convinced that women had a special and official role to play in the ministry to the poor, this small group persuaded the



*After completing the two-year program of studies and a three-month internship, and serving as class president at the San Francisco National Training School, Deaconess Maurer accepted the recently vacated position "missionary among immigrants," a position she would hold at Angel Island for nearly forty years. Courtesy of General Commission Archives and History (Katharine Maurer Papers), United Methodist Church Archives, Madison, New Jersey.*





*Deaconess Maurer with immigration officials, including a public health physician on the right. Even after other deaconesses exchanged traditional religious attire for conventional and modern dress after World War I, Maurer wore the black dress and bonnet, along with her ebony cross and fashionable black cape, until the end of her life. Her dignified dress and bearing matched that of her governmental colleagues. Courtesy of Mary Agnes Dougherty.*

Church hierarchy to establish the office of deaconess. In 1888 Methodist deaconesses in the United States (and in 1894) in Canada began their ministry among the needy. Two-year training schools throughout the country were established to prepare single women between the ages of 20 and 40 with an in-depth Bible education and practical skills in a variety of vocations, including the nascent profession of social work. As missionaries and as a trained work force, deaconesses staffed numerous agencies and institutions, many that served immigrants.<sup>48</sup>

It was within the office of deaconess that the

strands of social work and evangelization came together. Katharine Maurer had dedicated herself to God and to Christian service (although she was not required to take any vows and could leave her vocation at any time). As social worker at the Angel Island Station she also dedicated herself to the welfare of immigrants. As a deaconess she attracted a respect that may not have come so quickly had she been wearing ordinary dress. Even after other deaconesses exchanged the traditional attire for conventional and modern dress after World War I, Maurer wore the black dress and black bonnet (fastened by two white linen or silk ties) along with her black ebony cross, augmented by a fashionable black cape, to the very end. She even suggested that perhaps the courteousness and cordiality shown to her by the Roman Catholic officials was attributable to her bonnet!<sup>49</sup> As a deaconess, with few family and few social responsibilities, Maurer was extraordinarily available; she seemed not to recognize limits to her service.<sup>50</sup> Sometimes her phone started ringing at 6:30 in the morning, and she received calls as late as midnight. She devoted her after-working hours and presumably many weekends to friendly visiting and visitors to her home. As a deaconess she could call on all sorts of help, both within the church (locally and nationally) and among public agencies. For example, she enlisted the services of the Chinese Methodist pastors and staff of the Chinese YMCA for “Gospel services and educational talks.”<sup>51</sup> For her Christmas celebrations she recruited women through the Woman’s Home Missionary Society to pull together presents and sweets (sometimes for over 500 detainees), a tree, music, and worship leaders from around the Bay Area. She commandeered a large array of supplies, including books for the library, for the use of detainees. Especially in the pre-1924 days at the immigration station, she coordinated services with many other agencies’ representatives. In addition to her direct services at the immigration station, she spent a good deal of time talking about her work—as many as 135 presentations in 1920-1921—thereby garnering her large network of help. (Among her supporters was the Tamalpais



*Deaconess Maurer on dock of immigration station. Courtesy of General Commission Archives and History (Katharine Maurer Papers), United Methodist Church Archives, Madison, New Jersey.*

Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution, which voted in 1920 to sponsor the work, leading eventually to support by the national organization.)

Like the majority of deaconesses, Katharine Maurer came from a rural background. It was a long way from the villages of Ontario, Canada in which she grew up to the streets of San Francisco's Chinatown and the detention quarters at the immigration station housing people from around the world. But certain features of her childhood (from the little that we know) helped prepare her for her forty-year career among immigrants.

As the ninth and last child of German-speaking immigrants, the Rev. Michael Maurer and Elizabeth Frey Maurer, Katharine (who was also

known as Kate and Katie) grew up within an ethnic community in rural Ontario. Her father, born in Deisbach in the German state of Baden in 1833, was an itinerant minister of the Evangelical Association; her mother, born in Buffalo, New York, was likely from a Mennonite family. Diverse German-speaking immigrants, who had been settling in Ontario since the late eighteenth century, came at first primarily from the United States, mostly Mennonites from Pennsylvania. Later arrivals, especially Lutherans and Roman Catholics, came directly from Europe. It is likely that the Frey family made their first North American home in Pennsylvania, later migrating to Ontario. The Maurer family may also have resided in Pennsylvania or come directly to Canada from Deisbach.<sup>52</sup>



*Esther Galarza Lopez and her children. The twins were born at the immigration station hospital in October 1913, a few weeks after the family arrived. Maurer noted, "Word was sent to me that two babies would need clothing, and so extra purchases were made for 'Francisco' and 'Maria Los Angeles.' I bought some gowns for the mother, not the plainest I could find, for I knew how she would appreciate a bit of ribbon and embroidery." Worried that they might become "public charges," immigration officials deported the Lopezes back to Mexico on December 27, 1913. Courtesy of California State Parks.*

While Katharine herself did not cross an ocean, she must have known firsthand some of the feelings of dislocation that migration produces. As an itinerant preacher the Rev. Maurer moved periodically from post to post among the province's German-speaking Evangelical communities. Such moves uprooted the family and challenged Elizabeth Frey and her children to regular absences of husband and father as he ministered to smaller communities within each

circuit. Like many other immigrants, Katharine's family's economic circumstances would have been very modest. In both the Methodist and Evangelical churches, preachers' salaries were notoriously low.

Though migratory, Katharine's early life centered on her family and the German-speaking church community, which would have provided not only religious training and inspiration but also social activities and probably a high degree of personal security. Except for attendance at public school where children from all backgrounds mingled, these ethnic-religious communities tended to be quite self-sufficient.<sup>53</sup> As the youngest of a large family, she might have acquired more knowledge of the larger community from older siblings. According to family lore she was a great reader, and she described herself as "a very imaginative child."<sup>54</sup> Katharine learned German at home, which later enabled her to interpret for and converse not only with German-speaking immigrants at Angel Island, but also with speakers of Yiddish.

Katharine's world widened when she enrolled as a student at the co-educational North-Western College in Napierville, Illinois, at the age of 17 in September of 1898. For the three terms of the school year she studied in the academic/preparatory department, a sub-collegiate course, which usually served to train future teachers or prepare students for college work.<sup>55</sup> After this year Katharine did not return to North-Western. Though a niece's account attributes her short time at college to the death of her mother and her need to take care of her father, the presence of two unmarried sisters at home suggests differently.<sup>56</sup> Katharine may well have intended to teach, as she apparently did—music, German, and English.

Unfortunately, the next ten years of Katharine's life are a mystery, and these are the years when most young people married (and Katharine was very attractive). That she did not marry does not preclude beaux and even an engagement. Katharine did not embark on her deaconess training until she was twenty-nine years old and four years after the death of her father.



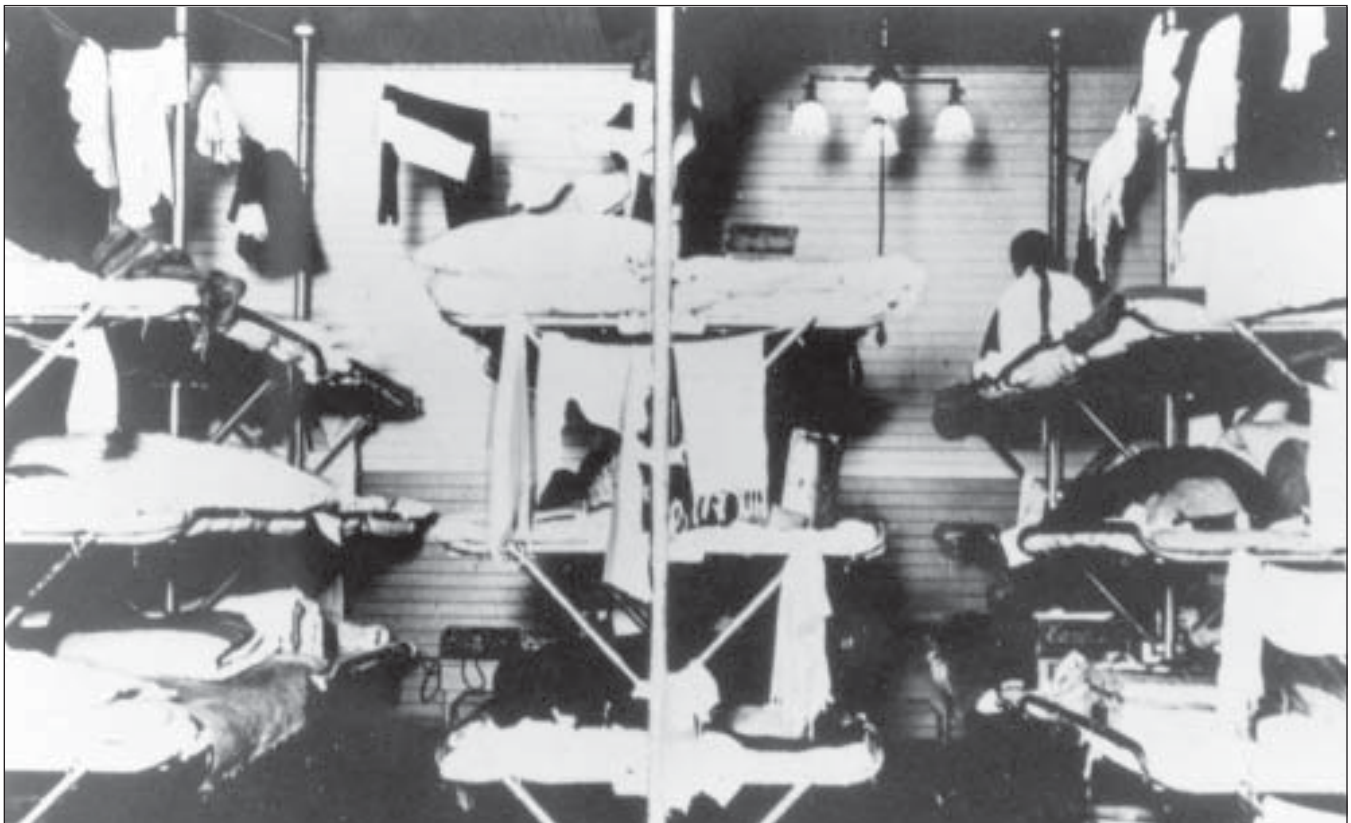
*Katharine Maurer in her twenties, a time in her life we know very little about. This portrait suggests that she had been engaged at one time. She did not embark on her deaconess training until the age of twenty-nine.  
Courtesy of Mary Agnes Dougherty.*

If, as her niece suggested, church work had interested her from early childhood, a long interval elapsed before she undertook the study that would commit her to a religious vocation. By now, however, she clearly felt motivated to work as a representative of God.<sup>57</sup> Katharine's choice to train in San Francisco rather than Toronto may have been influenced by her stay in 1907 and part of 1908 in Salem, Oregon where her brother Ezra, who had followed in his father's ministerial footsteps, and her sister Mary had relocated.<sup>58</sup>

After completing the two-year program of studies, and a three-month internship, and serving as class president at the San Francisco National Training School, Deaconess Maurer accepted the recently vacated position at Angel Island as "missionary among immigrants." And she, herself, was an immigrant. For the next five years she remained a British subject and did not bother to take out naturalization papers. Though she worked under the auspices of a federal bureau, she was not

employed by the government—the Woman's Home Missionary Society provided her allowance. However, things changed in the spring of 1917, when the United States entered the war. We will probably never know whether she felt compelled to take out her "first papers" because of her lack of American citizenship or because of her German background (or perhaps both). It was a time when undivided loyalty was required and prejudice against people of German ancestry was zealously expressed. Just two months after the U.S. declared war against Germany, Katharine Maurer declared her intention to become a citizen.

There was probably little in Maurer's background that prepared her for an encounter with Chinese people. From her contact with the predominantly Chinese long-term detainees at Angel Island and her two-year residency in the Methodist Chinese Home, she developed not only life-long friends, but an interest in Chinese culture. Her contacts in Chinatown were numerous



*Occupied dormitory in detention barracks (for men) or in administration building (for women and children under twelve).  
Courtesy of California State Parks.*



Three-year-old Rose Paik (Pok Yun Sun) with her mother Anna Yim (Im So See) and stepsister Pok Kyang Whan from Korea with Deaconess Maurer (on the left) on the rooftop of the administration building, 1914.  
 Courtesy of the Records of the Mission Education and Cultivation Program Department, General Board of Global Ministries, United Methodist Church Archives, GCAH, Madison, New Jersey.

enough to warrant a business card with her name both in English and in Chinese. Families honored Maurer by naming their daughters after her.<sup>59</sup> While she frowned on traditional Chinese religion, she made it a point to become familiar with other aspects of the culture. These efforts went beyond her “visits to the restaurants with the young workers...” She took the time to learn a little Chinese, mostly greetings, but also the Lord’s Prayer and the hymn “Jesus Loves Me.”<sup>60</sup> She read Chinese poetry and proverbs and incorporated both in speeches and articles. At the Jubilee Meeting of the Woman’s Home Mission Society in 1930 or 1931, for example, Maurer began a talk by referring to “a Chinese motto I have at home, which... reads something like this: ‘As the power of womanhood increases, its light is spread abroad in the world.’”<sup>61</sup> Unfortunately the

two verses from *Pai Tai Shun* that concluded a 1937 article did not make it into its published form.<sup>62</sup> Chinese (and other Asian) artifacts graced her home. Some were gifts from appreciative families; others she collected herself. A niece remembered in particular a hand-painted teapot, a one-hundred-year-old embroidered tapestry, an Imari bowl, and a statue of Kuan Yin. The English-language *Chinese World* devoted a two-column article to the deaconess at the time of her retirement (in 1951 at the age of 70). The writer noted that “her keen understanding of the needs of others and her wisdom in dealing with delicate situations have earned for her the loving titles *Kwan Yim* [sic], Goddess of Mercy, and *Angel of Angel Island*.”<sup>63</sup>

Throughout Maurer’s forty-year career, the population detained at the San Francisco immigration



*An overloaded circuit in the basement of the administration building caused a fire at midnight on August 12, 1940.*

*On the following Monday morning Deaconess Maurer reported that “a sad and tragic sight awaited us at the Immigration Station. The Administration Building had been completely destroyed by fire, including our two rooms with all our equipment, supplies, books, and other indispensable belongings swept away. ... With 400 people in detention it was nothing short of a miracle that no lives were lost.” Courtesy San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library.*

station varied according to increasingly restrictive immigration laws, world events, and periodic national campaigns against certain resident groups—non-citizen “radicals,” prostitutes, and paupers, for example. The needs and distresses of arriving refugees, immigrants, sojourners, and resident aliens the government attempted to deport, however, remained the same. The deaconess, from her life experiences finely tuned into the human psyche, responded consistently by taking care of basic necessities and attending to emotional needs. From the heartfelt letters, poems, and comments that have survived, written, and spoken by a remarkable variety of people from all corners of the earth and all walks of life, it is clear that she possessed an extraordinary ability to

connect with people. Though motivated by her Christian beliefs and actively seeking to gather souls for God, she managed to transcend religion, ethnicity, and class. In the national atmosphere of anti-immigrant feelings and amid the more local anti-Asian sentiments that pervaded her working years, Maurer offered not only comfort but also a different vision of human relationships. As best as she could, she modeled tolerance and an ethic of equality. Convinced that her work was “worldwide in scope,” she sought to promote improved “interracial relations and international understanding.” Katharine Maurer was distinctive not only in her deaconess dress, but in her views of humanity and her ability to work effectively with diverse individuals.

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After an active retirement, the deaconess died on June 24, 1962. She is buried at Cypress Lawn Cemetery, Colma.

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The research and writing of this article could not have been done without the help of Mary Agnes Dougherty, historian of the Methodist deaconess movement, who has most generously since the early 1990s shared her research and located documents in her collection. For this I am most grateful. Canadian archivists and keepers of web-sites have also contributed their expertise and found sources of family information. Thanks to: Sheila Hill, Karen Jacob, and Karen Wagner; and also to Kimberly Butler at North Central College in Illinois for information about Katharine's enrollment at North-Western. Archivist Rosemary Kennedy at the National Archives in San Bruno and her volunteers located citizenship papers and microfilm lists of U.S.–Canadian border crossings.

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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*First-time contributor and San Francisco-born public historian and independent scholar, Maria Sakovich researches, writes, and develops exhibits in the areas of immigration, family, and community history. Her own family history has inspired her interest in the Angel Island Immigration Station. She has written about the non-Asian immigrants and World War I German alien enemies and radicals as well as Deaconess Maurer. She is currently working on a book about the Russian refugee immigrants who settled in San Francisco during the 1920s and '30s.*

#### NOTES

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1. "Scottie" [John McDonald] to San Francisco Inspector J.X. Strand, September 2, 1933. McDonald, who had spent time at Angel Island, wrote his letter from Ellis Island, his last stop before being deported. "...I don't care," he wrote, "how good they [the ladies who do the welfare work at Ellis Island] may be, I will still back our Angel, as a first class favourite anytime." File 55853/169, Accession 58A734, RG 85, NARA-DC.



*Deaconess Maurer on the occasion of her retirement, June 11, 1951 (at age 70). At her funeral service eleven years later, the Rev. Leon Martorano commented, "in her retirement, her leadership was anything but retiring."*  
Courtesy of Mary Agnes Dougherty.

2. Constance Willis Camp, "Kuan Yin: Goddess of Mercy of Angel Island," pamphlet (Cincinnati: Woman's Home Mission Society, n.d.)
3. From letter published in "Angel Island," *Woman's Home Missions*, July-August 1936, p.9.
4. In an untitled and unpublished article supporting a memorial to Maurer, historian Mary Agnes Dougherty speaks to the importance of placing Maurer's work in context of the Methodist deaconess movement and immigration history.
5. Maurer's reports were published in the *Annual Report of the Woman's Home Missionary Society* and in the *Annual Report of the California Conference of the Woman's Home Missionary Society*. The magazine *Woman's Home Missions* (cited hereafter as *WHM*) sometimes published her talks and short articles. These can be found in the California-Nevada Conference Archives of The United Methodist Church that are held at Pacific School of



- Religion, Berkeley, the Archives of the United Methodist Church at Drew University, New Jersey, and in the small collection of Katharine Maurer papers at the California State Library.
6. "Remembering Katharine Maurer," video made by Mary Agnes Dougherty in conversation with Frances Maurer Schneider, [1985].
  7. Thomas Pitkin, *Keepers of the Gate: A History of Ellis Island* (New York: New York University Press, 1975), p.78; Barry Moreno, "Immigrant Aid Societies," *Encyclopedia of Ellis Island*, Westport, NY: Greenwood Press, 2004., 109.
  8. Constance Willis Camp, "Kuan Yin: Goddess of Mercy at Angel Island," pamphlet (Cincinnati, Ohio: WHMS, n.d.).
  9. Edward L. Haff to James L. Houghteling, Commissioner of Immigration, January 21, 1935, File 12030/1, RG 85, NARA-SB.
  10. Edward L. Haff to James L. Houghteling, January 17, 1940, File 55853/169, Accession 58A 734, RG 85, NARA-DC.
  11. Carrie Isabel Pierson, "The Immigrant on the Pacific Coast," *WHM*, January 1912, 7.
  12. Eight-page pamphlet, n.d., 5, Folder ?, KRM papers, California State Library; Limwerk: File 12986/27-10, NARA-SB. Women arriving without family members in the United States could not enter the country without having to prove that they would not become public charges. Through World War I, immigration officials, fearful that single women would be preyed upon by those in the business of prostitution permitted entry only under parole, i.e., to a responsible individual or institution.
  13. Katharine R. Maurer, "Angel Island--'Keeper of the Western Gate,'" *WHM*, May 1937, p.4.
  14. Mary Agnes Dougherty, "Island 'Angel' Now Forgotten," unpublished article, 1999.
  15. "We can't supply their wants; ... we can only supply their needs." *AR WHMS 1918/19*, p.212.
  16. Katharine R. Maurer, "A Day at Angel Island," pamphlet (New York: WHMS, n.d.).
  17. *AR, California Conference, WHMS, 1916*, 19. In both the national and California annual reports, statistics documenting Maurer's work were included. Careful tabulations were made in several categories, including: calls made, visits to hospital and to county jail, letters written, meetings addressed on work, number of nationalities.
  18. Katharine R. Maurer, "Report of the Work of the U.S. Immigration Station, Angel Island, California from June 30, 1912 to June 30, 1913," *AR, California Conference WHMS, 1913*, p.24.
  19. "A Few Extracts from Letters Received by Our Deaconess at Angel Island," (from "An English woman who had found Life very difficult"), p.2, Folder 20, KRM papers, California State Library.
  20. "Angel of Angel Island Likes to Make Aliens Like America," February 13, 1933, clipping from undisclosed San Francisco newspaper.
  21. Katharine R. Maurer, "Angel Island--'Keeper of the Western Gate,'" *WHM*, May 1937, p.5.
  22. *AR WHMS, 1925/26*, p.165.
  23. "Angel of Angel Island Likes to Make Aliens Like America," February 13, 1933.
  24. John Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860-1925* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1988 [2nd ed.]. See Chapter 9 "Americanization Movement," p.234-263.
  25. Katharine R. Maurer, "Americanization," 4, Folder 22, KRM papers. Interestingly, Maurer reveals a more internationalist than nationalist perspective when closes her or talk with a quote from the poet A.L. Tennyson: "The war drums throbbed no longer, and the battle flags were furled/In the Parliament of Man, the Federation of the world."
  26. "Americanization," pp. 4 and 6.
  27. Among the early pioneers of social work were the Methodist churchwomen who advocated to establish the Deaconess order and incorporated "friendly visiting" into its training. In 1899 the San Francisco National Training School offered preparation in "Social Service" and in "Field Work Evidences." Note 13, p. 161, Mary Agnes Dougherty, "San Francisco National Training School" in *My Calling to Fulfill: Deaconesses in the United Methodist Tradition* (New York: Women's Division, General Board of Global Ministries, The United Methodist Church, 1997). The role of church women is not acknowledged in general histories of social work. See, for example, Donald Brieland, "Social Work Practice: History and Evolution," in *Encyclopedia of Social Work*, Vol 19 (New York: National Association of Social Workers, 1995).
  28. *AR California Conference WHMS, 1913*, p.23.
  29. Katharine R. Maurer, "Busy Days at Angel Island, San Francisco," *WHM*, June 1921, p.1.
  30. Katharine R. Maurer, "Talks by Missionaries at the Jubilee Meeting," *WHM*, March 1931, p.11.
  31. "Americanization," p.8.
  32. Maurer, "Report of Angel Island Immigration Work," *AR, California Conference, WHMS, 1916*, 21.
  33. Maurer, "Angel Island," *AR 1922/23 WHMS*, 190.
  34. Edward L. Haff to James L. Houghteling, January 17, 1940.
  35. Pitkin, *Keepers of the Gate*, p.79-80.
  36. (Italics mine.) Letter addressed to "Dear Friends," December 29, 1939, File 55853/169, ACC 58A 734, RG 85, NARA-DC. Maurer's comment in Katherine R. Maurer, "A Day at Angel Island," pamphlet (New York; WHMS, n.d.) that "even the Jewish women and

- children wanted to see [the Royal Scroll Bible pictures]” that she was showing to a group in the women’s quarters, suggests that she did not direct her Christianizing efforts to Jewish detainees. Friendly remarks made by Jewish detainees noted in various reports also suggest that this was the case.
37. Eunice Jones Stickland, “More than an Angel,” December 1944, 16.
  38. Clarence N. Roberts, *North Central College: A Century of Liberal Education, 1861-1961* (Naperville, Illinois: North Central College, 1960), p.3, 17.
  39. Katharine R. Maurer, “Talks by Missionaries at the Jubilee Meeting,” *WHM*, March 1931, p.12.
  40. Katharine R. Maurer, untitled handwritten description of beginnings of WHMS work at AIIS, 3 pp, Folder 22, KRM Papers, California State Library.
  41. Letter quoted in Maurer, “Angel Island,” *WHM*, July-August, 1935, p.9-10.
  42. Maurer, “Immigration Work at Angel Island,” *WHM*, April 1914, p.21.
  43. Maurer, “U.S. Immigration Station, Angel Island, San Francisco, California,” n.d., [c. 1938], Folder 25, KRM papers, California State Library.
  44. Maurer, “From Angel Island, San Francisco,” *WHM* (Annual Meeting Daily), October 28, 1920, p.5.
  45. Photo #3 attached to [DAR] typescript (12 pp.) at the end, “Angel Island,” n.d. [c. 1929], Folder 24, KRM papers, California State Library.
  46. Maurer, “U.S. Immigration Station, San Francisco, California,” typed manuscript, n.d. [1941], Folder 23, KRM Papers, California State Library.
  47. The duties of the deaconess are stated in the Discipline of the Church, cited in Jeannine E. Olson, *One Ministry, Many Roles: Deacons and Deaconesses through the Centuries* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1992), p.274.
  48. For the origins of the deaconess movement see: Mary Agnes Dougherty, “The Social Gospel According to Phoebe,” in Hilah F. Thomas and Rosemary Skinner Keller, eds., *Women in New Worlds: Historical Perspectives on the Wesleyan Tradition* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1981); Dougherty, “The Methodist Deaconess: A Case of Religious Feminism,” *Methodist History* (January 1983); Jeannine E. Olson, Chapter, *One Ministry, Many Roles: Deacons and Deaconesses through the Centuries*
  49. To a Protestant reader accustomed to the anti-Catholic rhetoric of the time, Maurer’s comment about working with government officials who were Roman Catholic and cordial and courteous signaled a fresh point of view.
  50. Mary Agnes Dougherty writes: “For Maurer’s generation of deaconesses the choice of that office involved passing up marriage and family. ... It was commonly agreed within the church that the married life was incompatible with the church office. Society at large held the same view based on the dominance of the single life for the first generation of female social workers.” (Personal communication , 13 June 2007.) Maurer’s predecessor at Angel Island, Carrie Isabelle Pierson, resigned in order to marry.
  51. Maurer, “Angel Island–‘Keeper of the Western Gate,’” *WHM*, May 1937, 5.
  52. Elizabeth Bloomfield, *Waterloo Township over Two Centuries* (Kitchner, Ontario: Waterloo Historical Society, 1995),
  53. Bloomfield’s description of German-speaking settlements and the importance of religion in all communities in Waterloo Township would cover other Ontario German-speaking communities, as well.
  54. Niece Frances Maurer Schneider (b. 1912), daughter of Katharine’s minister brother Ezra, has reminisced about her aunt in two short similar essays (one dated 1991) and in Mary Agnes Dougherty’s video “Remembering Katharine Maurer,” 1985. Maurer’s references to authors and publications in her 1920 “Americanization” essay suggest that she continued to read avidly as an adult. She seems to have kept up with the literature concerning immigration. In this one instance she mentions Israel Zangwill, Edward A. Steiner, and Mary Antin.
  55. Communication from Kimberly Butler, archivist, North Central College, 2 November 2006.
  56. I am most grateful to archivist Karen Wagner, Wellington County Museum and Archives (Ontario), for finding the information regarding the place of residence for the Maurer family in the 1901 Census. For “Catherine Mawer” see <http://automatedgenealogy.com/census/DisplayPagePanel.jsp?id=98886&highli> .
  57. Had she not been committed, a secular path to social work was available through settlement houses or through recently established professional training.
  58. Eventually most of Katherine’s brothers and sisters migrated to Oregon. See [www.oregonpioneers.com/marion/Lee](http://www.oregonpioneers.com/marion/Lee)
  59. Maurer, “U.S. Immigration Station, San Francisco, California,” typescript, n.d. [1941], 5, Folder 23, KRM Papers, California State Library
  60. Stickland, p.16.
  61. Maurer, “Talks by Missionaries at the Jubilee Meeting,” *WHM*, March 1931, p.11.
  62. Maurer “Angel Island–‘Keeper of the Western Gate,’” typed manuscript, n.d. [c. 1937], Folder 23, KRM Papers.
  63. “Katharine Maurer, ‘Kwan Yim’ of Angel Island, Retires after 40 Years,” *The Chinese World*, June 30, 1951, p.2.