

ALMA MATHEWS AND KATHRYN MAURER



Photo: General Commission on Archives and History

Alma Mathews



Photo: General Commission on Archives and History

Kathryn Maurer

Ministry to Immigrant Women and Children

In the late 19th century, the Women's Home Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church identified a serious problem—immigrant women arriving on American shores alone or with children, needing help and care as they navigated a new beginning in a new country.

From the 1890s to 1922, Deaconess **Alma Mathews** combed the docks of New York City seeking single immigrant women disembarking. Without regard to language barriers or concerns for her own safety, she approached these women and their families and guided them through the immigration process. Free lodging was provided at the Immigrant Girls' Home and assistance offered on the next stages of their journeys.

Alma initially worked with her parents, Helen and James Mathews, and would continue after they left the ministry. By 1887, the work had grown so much that it was turned over to the Woman's Home Missionary Society. By that year, the ministry had met 808 ships and hosted 3,004 lodgers. The successful program was replicated in Boston, Philadelphia, Charleston, New Orleans and San Francisco.

For 40 years, beginning in 1912, Deaconess **Kathryn Maurer** took the ferry every day to the Angel Island Immigration Center in San Francisco to greet immigrants, mostly from China, and help them adjust. An immigrant from Canada herself and the youngest of nine children, Maurer made sure the needs of the new arrivals, some of whom were detained for years, were met. She brought the families food and medical care, she taught them English and wrote letters and appeals on their behalf.

While making sure medical and basic needs were met, Maurer also sought to raise spirits, bringing dolls for the children and hosting Christmas parties. For her devotion, a local newspaper dubbed her "the angel of Angel Island."

Sources: Alfred T. Day, III, "A United Methodist story of welcoming the immigrant," www.umnews.org, and United Methodist Women, with modifications.