



## DISCOVERY

Edited by  
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Tangential but interesting documents are frequently discovered while doing archival research. Such is the case with this month's contribution to this column. Janet Rice McCoy made this discovery at the United Methodist Archives at Drew University while reviewing primary sources for her dissertation on the missionary enterprise in China.

This memorial was drafted and adopted on April 14, 1890, by the Committee on China of the Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church. William M. Evarts, a United States Senator from New York, received the petition relating to pending legislation on the deportation or imprisonment of Chinese nationals who failed to obtain a certificate from an enumerator during the Census of 1890. A distinguished statesman, Evarts had previously served as Secretary of State under Rutherford B. Hayes and Attorney General under Andrew Johnson. As a prominent New Yorker, he also raised funds for the base of the Statue of Liberty and gave a speech at the unveiling of "The Lady" on October 28, 1886.

This handwritten manuscript highlights the continuing tension within American society as citizens struggled to define their national identity in light of cyclical influxes of immigrant populations. Between 1850 and 1880, the Chinese population increased dramatically as inexpensive labor was required in the mining, agricultural, and industrial sectors of the American West. In 1868, the year before the Transcontinental Railroad was completed with substantial Chinese labor, the United States and China signed the Burlingame Treaty allowing for a free flow of immigration between their two countries. By the 1870s, however, legislation was being introduced in the United States Congress to limit or prohibit Chinese immigration. This

culminated in the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, a watershed event, marking a reversal of America's traditional policy of unrestricted immigration. For the first time in American history, a specific group of people was labeled as undesirable for immigration.

The drafting of this document also coincided with the official closing of the American frontier as reported by the Census of 1890. In his landmark essay, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," Fredrick Jackson Turner believed this transformational event would have uncertain consequences since America's national identity had previously been shaped by its ever-advancing frontier. Henceforth, the United States would need to look beyond its continental boundaries, overseas, or beyond the skies, for new frontiers to conquer.

This petition to the United States Senate reflects both the church's humanitarian response to Chinese immigrants in the United States as well as a pragmatic concern for American citizens and property in China. The committee's apprehension was especially apparent in the amendment they adopted. This addendum focused on the thousands of dollars that the Methodist Episcopal Church had invested in property on Chinese soil since the arrival of their first missionaries in the treaty port of Fuzhou in 1847.

To the U.S. Senate.-

The Board of Managers of the Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church earnestly protest against the passage of the bill (H.R. 6.420) which provides for the deportation or imprisonment for five years of Chinese persons found in this country after the 1<sup>st</sup> of September next, without a certificate from the Census Enumerators. While we recognize that the Amendments proposed by the Senate Committee remove some of the most unjust features of the bill, we nevertheless feel it to be our duty to protest earnestly against any enactment which would imprison a person found upon our soil without such a certificate as if he were guilty of a crime.

The continued course of unfriendly legislation against Chinese, awaking a spirit of retaliation amongst the statesmen and people of China, is likely to result disastrously to our missionaries and merchants in that Empire,\* We most emphatically protest against additional legislation in this line, and insist upon it that it is the duty of a Christian Government to keep good faith in regard to the treaties now existing. We beseech your honorable body to listen to the earnest protests which have already been sent by the Christian Conferences of different denominations, and not allow the proposed bill to become a law.

Signed by order and on behalf of the Board of Managers of  
the Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church.

\*["within whose bounds the Methodist Episcopal Church has many thousands of dollars invested in mission premises."-Amendment by the Board.]