

OCTOBER 2020

October Monthly Meeting Recording and Reclaiming Our Histories: “Celestials” Film Screening and Discussion

On October 7, we will present an insightful segue to the very informative talk by Gordon Chang in September on the role of Chinese workers in building railroads in America. Shortly after the Stanford Chinese Railroad Workers Project, directed by Prof. Chang, was begun in 2012, documentary filmmaker Barre Fong was brought in to record the stories of Chinese railroad worker descendants. He has since created a short film from these interviews, purposefully entitled “*Celestials*” to promote discussion. In the meantime, for five years now, he has been embedded within an international research team conducting the first archaeological study of a migrants’ home village in southern China’s Pearl River Delta. *Making Ties: The Cangdong Village Project* chronicles the challenges, successes, and outcomes of this study. The film provides an intimate window into the practical experience of archaeological field research, and illuminates how the study of material culture can reveal complex networks that connected 19th century Chinese migrants with their home villages. This evening, we will hear a panel discussion with Barre Fong, the filmmaker, and Laura Ng, an archaeologist and member of the research team in Cangdong Village. The speakers will present and comment on excerpts from both “*Celestials*” and *Making Ties: The Cangdong Village Project*, followed by Q and A.



Barre Fong is a fourth generation Chinese American and San Francisco native. Barre’s activities as a filmmaker and community activist is an embodiment of his grandfather’s dream of preserving his own experience as a turn-of-the-Century Chinese immigrant. He previously served as the President of the Board of Directors for the Chinese Historical Society of America. He studied film, and has produced and directed short films about the Asian American experience since 2013. His films on San Jose’s Chinatowns and post-Vietnam War refugees have received wide recognition.



Laura W. Ng is a PhD Candidate in the Department of Anthropology at Stanford University. Her parents immigrated from Toisan, and she grew up in our nearby neighborhood of Lincoln Heights. After studies at UC San Diego (BA Anthropology) and U. Mass. Boston (M.A. Historical Archaeology), she has conducted archaeological research, at sites in the U.S. and Iceland, and for the past five years, on the home villages of Chinese migrants.

The Cangdong Village Project: During the 1800s, more than 2.5 million people left China’s Pearl River Delta region, creating new communities around the world. Their cultural and economic influences also transformed their home villages. The Cangdong Village Project was developed to investigate how daily life changed in migrant’s home villages during and after migration. The Cangdong Village Project is a joint undertaking of the Stanford

CHSSC Meeting will be online on Zoom:

Wednesday, October 7, 2020

Program: 5:00 PM

To register, [click here.](#)

Archaeology Center, the Guangdong Qiaoxiang Cultural Research Center at Wuyi University, and the Guangdong Provincial Institute of Cultural Relics and Archaeology.



President's Letter

How does CHSSC measure progress? The ability to outreach to a wider audience.

Since 2013, CHSSC has been organizing annual pilgrimage trips to Yosemite National Park in order to discover the contributions of the Chinese in Yosemite and to make that history known. The pilgrimage included visiting historic roads and trails built by Chinese and learning about contributions made by Chinese laborers. Some participants took an optional backpacking trip to Sing Peak afterwards.

The spreading of the Chinese history in Yosemite to a general audience began in the September 2017 issue of *Southwest The Magazine*. Their article “The Place Where History Comes Back to Life” focused on the Mather Mountain Party’s impact on creating a single bureau to oversee the national parks and their gourmet chef, Tie Sing. Jack Shu explains that the pilgrimage is part of an effort to spotlight the unsung heroes, like Sing, who brought Yosemite into existence. In 2018 Assemblyman Frank Bigelow presented CHSSC and NPCA a copy of Resolution 262 which recognizes the contributions of the early Chinese laborers to the development of Yosemite National Park. August 1st of this year, CHSSC partnered with the NPS and the NPCA to have our 8th annual pilgrimage—virtually. The September 2020 issue of AAA’s *Westways* magazine has a six-page article with photos: “Tracking the Tiger in Yosemite: A personal odyssey in search of the park’s lost Chinese American history.” The author, Alison Singh Gee, details her personal pilgrimage as she attended our 2019 pilgrimage. Within the year, there will be a new museum created in a former Chinese laundry in Wawona that tells the Chinese history in Yosemite.

Our September monthly meeting featuring Gordon Chang and Will Gow of Stanford drew our widest attendance ever. People wanted to know more about the Chinese building the railroad from the experts in the field.

The outreach has attracted new members and donations. More importantly, the outreach has helped us move toward reaching our educational mission.

Susan

Funding has been provided by a generous grant from the California Humanities and the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH). Funding has been provided by NEH as part of the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act economic stabilization plan of 2020.

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Howard Wang

New Board as of September 1, 2020.

MISSION STATEMENT

The Chinese Historical Society of Southern California was organized in November 1975. The purposes of the Society are:

1. to bring together people with a mutual interest in the important history and historical role of Chinese and Chinese Americans in southern California;
2. to pursue, preserve, and communicate knowledge of this history; and
3. to promote the heritage of the Chinese and Chinese American community in support of a better appreciation of the rich, multicultural society of the United States.



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Virtual Pilgrimage to Yosemite, August 2020

BY HOWARD WANG

Due to COVID-19, a virtual pilgrimage to Yosemite hosted by CHSSC, the National Park Service (NPS), and the National Parks and Conservation Association (NPCA). was held on August 1st.

Historian Eugene Moy introduced the history of CHSSC and the Yosemite pilgrimage. NPS Park Ranger Yenyen Chan used historic photos from the 1800s to tell the history of the Chinese who worked at the Yosemite Wawona Hotel as well as others who worked in the Sierra Nevada. Vital to the history of Yosemite is when Assistant Secretary of the Interior, Stephen Mather gathered a group of influential men to visit Yosemite in an attempt to pass the National Park Service Act. A Chinese chef, Tie Sing, prepared gourmet food for the Mather party. This wilderness dining is depicted in a children's book, *Mountain Chef*, written by Annette Pimentel and illustrated by Rich Lo.

NPS Chief of Educational Interpretation, Sabrina Diaz, detailed the plans for the conversion of the Chinese Laundry Building into a museum that provides space for exhibits relating the past contributions of the Chinese in Yosemite. The goal is to facilitate learning about the park history and relate its relevance to today. The new museum will tell an important untold story in Yosemite National Park.

In lieu of the traditional pilgrimage potluck, cooking demonstrations by Bayard Fong (salted fish and pickled apricot), and Paul Lee (Haupia with fruit compote) were given.

The video presentation is available for viewing on the CHSSC website or by clicking on the link here: <https://youtu.be/N4zQwahu6Cg>

To read about CHSSC's 7th annual Yosemite Pilgrimage:

Alison Singh Gee. "Tracking the Tiger in Yosemite: A personal odyssey in search of the park's lost Chinese American History" *Westways*. (The magazine of Auto Club members). September/October issue.



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September Monthly Meeting

BY SUSAN DICKSON

Switching from in-person monthly meetings to virtual monthly meetings required a new subset of skills and many decisions regarding the best platform to use, setting up Eventbrite registrations, and coordinating the event flyers, *News 'N Notes*, and website. Our featured speaker, Stanford scholar Gordon Chang was a meeting magnet. Within 3 days the maximum registration of 100 people had been reached necessitating us upgrading to a webinar.

Gordon Chang's initial remarks focused on the Chinese Railroad Workers in North America Project begun in 2012 at Stanford University. Former CHSSC board member and Stanford professor Will Gow briefly explained his research into the history of the Chinese Railroad workers in United States history textbooks. In the main part of the event Gordon Chang answered many questions about the Chinese railroad workers in the United States as well as those in Canada.

The 208 participants in the meeting were disappointed that we ended the program after an hour, leaving many questions unanswered. Gordon has agreed to come back for a future to continue his conversation with us. We are in the process of getting putting the September meeting onto our website. Check in the near future if you missed the presentation.

Major Donors

Boeing (The Blackbaud Giving
Fund) \$7,500
Anonymous donor

Russell Leong \$2,500

Network for Good
(thanks to John Chan)

Calvin D. Lee

Frances Tso Yee

Donors

John Chen

Randy Chow

William Chu

Andrea Rojas

Yi Jin

Amazon Smile Charity
(Thanks to Linda Bentz)



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Outgoing Board Members

Winnie Lew joined CHSSC in the 1990s mainly to learn more about her grandfather, Tom Shee Bin, an herbalist. Later with the encouragement of Munson Kwok and Suellen Cheng, Winnie joined the board when the board meetings were held above Phoenix Bakery. She has served continuously since then as Secretary, VP Programs and board member. Throughout these years we remember Winnie's furnishing hot drinks and snacks for our monthly meetings and playing the piano during our Christmas carol sing-a-long.

Teresa Chung graduated from UCLA, as a history major with an emphasis on Asian History. Teresa began as an intern for CHSSC from 2013-2014. As an intern, she worked on the CHSSC library catalog. Teresa also spent time stripping paint off the wooden pieces of the porch as part of redoing the 411 Bernard Street house. After joining the board Teresa became our treasurer. Since she is attending accounting classes while working full time, she has had to step away from the board.

Wendy Chung came to us while researching Chinatown for her master's thesis in urban planning at USC. In rapid succession, she started WAPOW Magazine for Chinatown, was hired by a city planning department, became the main facilitator for the Chinatown Sustainability Dialogue Group to help guide input into a new community plan, and joined our board. However, she has had to step away to help her family business.

2021 Walking Tour Grant

The Society of Architectural Historians has awarded CHSSC a \$3,900 grant for developing and implementing walking tours of Chinatown for underserved youth to study urban design, architecture, public space design, and community engagement. Although CHSSC has been conducting walking tours for people of all ages since 1981, the new walking tours will also incorporate innovative ways to understand the Chinatown community. Since the original proposal requested support for field trips via school bus, a major cost, CHSSC may need to develop virtual walking tours as an alternative.

Become a Citizen Archivist

BY LINDA BENTZ

Citizen Archivists needed! As discussed in previous issues of News 'n Notes CHSSC has partnered with the National Archives to make Chinese Exclusion Act Case Files available to the public. Many of the Southern California case files have been digitized and are currently available at <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/5830001>. The records are a major resource for the study of Chinese immigration and Chinese American travel, trade, and social history from the late 19th to mid-20th centuries. Because many of these documents relate to individual immigrants, they are invaluable for the study of Chinese and Chinese American family history. Please help us tag, comment, and transcribe these records for greater access. To learn more please visit <https://www.archives.gov/citizen-archivist/missions/chinese-heritage>.





Chinese Historical Society of Southern California

411 Bernard Street, Los Angeles, CA 90012
Phone: 323-222-0856 Email: info@chssc.org
Website: www.chssc.org

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Community Calendar

Have you checked out our updated website for CHSSC and Community events? Look for upcoming webinars and Zoom conferences about Chinese American culture and history.