

AUGUST 2010



Irvin Lai at the Memorial Wall at Evergreen Cemetery. Photo by O.C. Lee

## Irvin R. Lai

1927 - 2010

*Community Leader,  
Community Activist,  
Local Hero*

Irvin Lai's community spirit was strongly influenced by his mother, Effie Lai, who was an unpaid social worker who helped the many women who moved to Locke, Calif. from China navigate the social welfare system. Through his mother's example, he witnessed the importance of helping the community.

As an adult, Irvin became an active promoter of culture, history and civil rights of Chinese Americans in Los Angeles, as well as on the state and national level.

Irvin began his civil rights activism when he joined the Los Angeles Lodge of the Chinese American Citizens Alliance in 1960. During his years at this civil rights organization, he rose to become the national Grand President in 1985. One of his most prominent plights while at CACA was on behalf of Vincent Chin who was murdered. Irvin and CACA's Grand Board convinced the federal government that this murderous act was a violation of Vincent Chin's civil rights.

*Continued on next page*





*Irvin R. Lai continued*

Mr. Lai was also very engaged in the local community. The Chinatown Public Safety Association and the Asian American Education Commission of LAUSD were created through his efforts. Mr. Lai and Dr. Diana Lee prevented the sale of the French Hospital (now Pacific Alliance Medical Center) to developers. Mr. Lai also helped revitalize the Chinese Chamber of Commerce by expanding its scope to Southern California and establishing an office in Chinatown. As a leader in the Chinese Historical Society of Southern California, Mr. Lai worked on the acquisition and fundraising for our property at 411-415 Bernard Street, as well as for the historic 1888 Chinese cemetery shrine in Evergreen Cemetery in Boyle Heights.



Mr. Lai is probably best known for being responsible for saving the Peking duck in America in 1980. He spearheaded the Chinese community's drive to change the law on the proper way to handle meat and food items. As a direct result of Mr. Lai's testimony at the State Congressional hearings in Sacramento, the committee unanimously agreed on a roast duck exemption to the health code.

Four years ago, Irvin became the primary voice for the Chinese community when over 170 gravesites were disturbed during

an MTA Gold Line expansion project in East L.A. On March 8, 2010 his years of work culminated in the dedication ceremony of the memorial wall at Evergreen Cemetery.

In addition, Mr. Lai was very active at his church, Alhambra True Light Presbyterian Church. He was on several church committees, along with being chairman of the church Chinese school he reactivated.

Lai is survived by a son, Lawrence; five daughters, Arlene Lowe, Corinne Gill, Irene Jong, Kathleen Lih and Pauline Yau; a brother, Collin; a sister, Mildred Wong; 12 grandchildren; and three great-grandchildren. His wife, Jessie, died in 1984.

## **Board of Directors**

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## **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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## Leon F. Lee

1911 - 2010

Leon Lee, long time owner of the Jin Hing Jewelry Store on Bamboo Lane, passed away on June 9 at the age of 99.

Mr. Lee was born in Canton, China in 1911. In 1928, he immigrated to San Francisco. He joined his father in Los Angeles after completing junior high school in 1933. At the height of the Great Depression, his father, a master goldsmith, rented a small store at 446 ½ Los Angeles Street across from the Plaza, the fire station, and the Garnier Building and started Jin Hing Co. They lived in a loft above the shop. Mr. Lee and his father had no experience with running a store, but Jin Hing Co. continues to exist today. The shop moved to its current location on Bamboo Lane in 1949, after the last of Old Chinatown was torn down.

Mr. Lee built his business by being friendly, honest, dependable, and hard working. He often worked late into the night to get jewelry orders done on time. Throughout his long career, he served many generations of Chinese Americans – from baby jewelry to wedding bands. He relied on repeat business from satisfied customers and word of mouth advertising to overcome what had become an isolated location on Bamboo Lane.

In 1984, four armed gunmen attempted to rob the store. Two policemen responded. In the shootout that followed, one policeman was killed and the other seriously wounded. Leon, then seventy-three years old, came to the aid of the policemen by grabbing a gun and shooting and killing one of the gunmen. The incident shocked the community into improving public safety. Leon continued to work for twenty-five years after the shootout.

Mr. Lee is survived by four of his five children and five grandchildren. His son Robert and some of the grandchildren continue to run Jin Hing.

## The Annual Chinese Historical Society of Southern California Summer Picnic

*Co-Hosted by the  
Chinese American Citizens Alliance*



Saturday, August 28, 2010

11:00 A.M.



Dim Sum Potluck

Bring your favorite



Shadow Park  
Community Club House  
12800 Alconbury Street  
Cerritos, CA 90703





AUGUST 2010



Saturdays, August 7th, 14th, 21st & 28th

Chinatown Summer Nights is almost upon us! Come to Chinatown every Saturday night in August for food and festivities. Activities are planned for all people of all ages and the event is free for all.

Each evening will have a unique hands-on family workshop from 5-8 p.m. Workshops will range from Chinese calligraphy to trying their hand at giving poetic names for the pavilions at the Huntington Library Gardens.

If you don't feel like making things yourself, the Los Angeles Craft Experience will be at the all-night parties on August 14th and 28th in Central Plaza with a variety of local, independent handmade businesses. Vendors will be selling everything from jewelry to art to clothing.

Interactive dance and exercise workshops will be held in Central Plaza from 6-7:30 p.m. Learn traditional ballroom or just let loose at Ryan Heffington's Sweat Sundays exercise/dance workshop on August 14th. Also, CHSSC Administrator Fenton Eng will be hosting a kung fu workshop on August 21st.



And if you feel like you got your moves down, KCRW DJs will start spinning at 8 p.m. till midnight.

CHSSC is the community sponsor of the second night on August 14th. Fittingly, the evening's theme is "wisdom," come by our table to purchase books on Chinatown history and learn about L.A. Chinatown's past.

Several of Chinatown's restaurants will be open, along with a fleet of trendy gourmet food trucks. There will also be live cooking demonstrations by local and not-so-local Chinese chefs.

Paid valet service will be available for cars, along with a free bike valet. Chinatown is accessible by the Metro Gold Line also.

For more details and the full schedule of each evening, go to [ChinatownSummerNights.com](http://ChinatownSummerNights.com). There is also a list of Chinatown vendors and restaurants that will be offering discounts every weekend.







## Holly Rose Lee

1912 - 2010

Beloved mother, grandmother, great-grandmother, partier extraordinaire. Preceded in death by husband Dr. Alfred "Ed" Lee, and son, Warren. Survived by daughters Priscilla, Virginia, Cherylene; grandchildren Charlyene, Melanie, Jason; great-grandchildren Brittany, Mia, Erin and Alice. Died on June 27, 2010.

Mrs. Lee was born on Dec. 26, 1912 to Tom T. Leung and Wong Bing Woo. She was named "Holly," because she was born the day after Christmas. She was the youngest girl of eight siblings, and the last surviving Leung of her generation. She married Dr. Alfred Ed Lee on Valentine's Day 1937. The story of the Lee family is encapsulated in the book "Sweet Bamboo."

Although she avoided the spotlight herself, she was a constant presence on the sets of the productions her children were part of – always encouraging them and diligently documenting every television and movie appearance with saved scripts, photographs and film clips.

Mrs. Lee had an insatiable appetite for life. She was always busy -- cleaning, shopping, knitting. And she always wanted those close to her to have a good time. Her birthday parties were always grand events, hosted in places like Las Vegas casinos and the Santa Anita Track. She also had the ability to cook food for large parties -- in her eulogy by her daughter, Cherylene Lee, she said, "her recipes never called for any smaller number" than 100.

Mrs. Lee requested that in lieu of flowers, donations be made to Chinese Historical Society of Southern California.

## Ralph Fong

1923-2010

Ralph Fong passed away Fri., 7/23/10.

His story, "Ralph Fong--Alameda, the World & Berkeley" by Edgar Wong, an interesting read, is featured in Portraits of Pride I, pages 123-128.

## Acknowledgements

Special thanks to Darryl Quon, O.C. Lee, Lucky OwYang, Eugene Moy, Fenton Eng and Gordon Hom for their efforts in building the entry ramp to 415 Bernard Street.

Meet Robert Chao Romero  
author of

## The Chinese in Mexico 1882-1940

Wednesday, September 15, 2010 7:00 p.m.

Castelar School  
840 Yale Street  
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Free parking - enter via College Street

*The event is open and free to the public.  
Refreshments will be served.*



An estimated 60,000 Chinese entered Mexico during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, constituting Mexico's second-largest foreign ethnic community at the time. The Chinese in Mexico, 1882-1940 provides a social history of Chinese immigration to and settlement in Mexico in the context of the global Chinese diaspora of the era.

Romero's study is based on a wide array of Mexican and U.S. archival sources. It draws from such quantitative and qualitative sources as oral histories, census records, consular reports, INS interviews, and legal documents. Two sources, used for the first time in this kind of study, provide a comprehensive sociological and historical window into the lives of Chinese immigrants in Mexico during these years: the Chinese Exclusion Act case files of the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service and the 1930 Mexican municipal census manuscripts. From these documents, Romero crafts a vividly personal and compelling story of individual lives caught in an extensive network of early transnationalism.

Robert Chao Romero is an Assistant Professor in the UCLA Chavez Department of Chicana/o Studies. He received his J.D. from U.C. Berkeley and his Ph.D. in Latin American history from UCLA.



## Chinese Historical Society of Southern California

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*Help us save paper and postage, email us for your online newsletter at [chssc@hotmail.com](mailto:chssc@hotmail.com)*

### Community Calendar

**Thursday & Friday August 5&6 9:00 to 6:00 pm**

**Asian American Journalists Association Career Expo**

Grand Ballroom (5th Level) of the Renaissance Hollywood Hotel  
& Spa in Los Angeles, California

[WWW.AAJA.ORG/PROGRAMS/2010CAREERFAIREXPO/](http://WWW.AAJA.ORG/PROGRAMS/2010CAREERFAIREXPO/)

**Sunday, August 8, 2010 11:30 am – 1:00 P.M**

**Plum tree Inn 913 N. Broadway Los Angeles Chinatown**

Learn how you can help the Angel Island Immigration Station Foundation. Eddie Wong-Executive Director of Angel Island Immigration Station Foundation will present information on a new exhibit about the contributions of Pacific Coast Immigrants. Special guests: Erika Lee & Jundy Yung, co-authors of Angel Island: Immigrant Gateway to America.

Please RSVP at [info@aiisf.org](mailto:info@aiisf.org) or call 415 262-4429

**Sunday, August 8, 2010**

**Angel Island: Immigrant Gateway - National Book Tour**

Authors Erika Lee and Judy Yung will join CAM for an intimate talk on this landmark book that provides the first comprehensive history of Angel Island Immigration Station.

Chinese American Museum

425 North Los Angeles Street Los Angeles, CA 90012

[www.camla.org](http://www.camla.org)

**Saturday, August 28, 2010 11:00 A.M.**

**CHSSC Summertime Picnic Potluck**

Bring your favorite Dim Sum

Shadow Park, Community Club House, Cerritos, CA  
[ladimsum.blogspot.com](http://ladimsum.blogspot.com)

**Saturdays, August 7th, 14th, 21st and 28th 5:00 P.M.**

**Chinatown Summer Nights**

Chinatown comes alive with music, good food and fun activities for all ages. Participate in Chinese cultural workshops.

[www.chinatownsummernights.com/](http://www.chinatownsummernights.com/)

**Friday, August 6, 2010 Opening of Exhibit**

**China Modern: Designing Popular Culture 1910-1970,**

explore the graphic arts of 20th century China.

Pacific Asia Museum

46 N. Los Robles Ave , Pasadena , CA 91101

Tel: 626.449.2742 ext 12

[www.pacificasiamuseum.org](http://www.pacificasiamuseum.org)

**Monday, September 13, 2010 7:00 pm Free**

**Charlotte Rees - Secret Maps of the Ancient World**

Fuels the controversial debate about whether the Chinese arrived in America before Columbus

Cerritos Library 18025 Bloomfield Avenue, Cerritos 90703

**Wednesday, September 15, 2010 7:00 P.M.**

**The Chinese in Mexico 1882-1940**

Meet the author Robert Chao Romero.

Castelar School, 840 Yale Street, Los Angeles, CA 90012

**Sunday, September 19, 2010**

**14TH Annual Historymakers Awards Banquet**

Hilton Universal City / Los Angeles Hilton / Sierra Ballroom

555 Universal Drive, Universal City, CA 91608

[www.camla.org](http://www.camla.org)