



# NEWS 'n NOTES

CHINESE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

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OCTOBER 2006

## NOVEMBER PROGRAM

*Guest Speaker*

*Will Gow*

**Wong Ah Gow and the Early Ventura County  
Chinese Community**

**WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 1, 2006, 7:00 P.M.**

**CASTELAR ELEMENTARY SCHOOL**

Multipurpose Room

**840 YALE STREET**

**LOS ANGELES, CHINATOWN**

**(PARK ON PLAYGROUND, ENTER ON COLLEGE  
STREET BETWEEN HILL AND YALE STREETS)**



Wong Ah Gow, 1853-1929

Will Gow, a fifth generation Chinese American, filmmaker and educator, will discuss the history of his family in Ventura County from the mid-1880s to the 1940s. Drawing on family photos, memoirs, articles from the Oxnard Courier as well as immigration files, Gow will interweave the story of his great-grandfather's arrival in Ventura County with the

*(cont'd on page 2)*

## REVIEW OF OCTOBER PROGRAM

**The Con Family and the Chinese  
in Costa Rica**

*By Yvonne Chang, CHSSC Staff*

Ernesto Con, a CHSSC member who is a painting contractor and a published poet, was the speaker at the October 4th meeting. He is a 5th generation Costa Rican Chinese who immigrated to Los Angeles with the intention of studying medicine. Below is a synopsis of his presentation.

In the 1870's hundreds of Chinese workers from the Guangzhou Province of China lured by the promise of a better life emigrated to Costa Rica to work on the construction of railroads. Three businessmen from the United States were chosen by the then President of Costa Rica, Tomas Guardia, as agents of the Costa Rican government in the hiring of Chinese workers. The name of the business is the Compañia del Ferrocarril (Railroad Company in English), Keith, Hubbe, and Grytzell. They drew a contract promising to give the Chinese workers plenty of food, living quarters, clothing, and five pesos a month for a 12-hour workday, medical care and three holidays for their religious festivities.

From 1870 to 1910, between exploitation and exclusion the promises in the contract were never honored. This fact is attested by two renown historians from the Universidad de Costa Rica, Marlene Loria and Alfonso Chaves. They wrote in "Chinese Immigration to Costa Rica," that "the health of the Chinese workers suffered a terrible deterioration under the abominable conditions and the cruel climate they were forced to work in contradiction to the stipulation in the contract..."

*(cont'd on page 2)*



# Chinese Historical Society of Southern California

OCTOBER 2006

*("November Program" from page 1)*

of the growth of the county's Chinese American community. One of the most prominent Chinese merchants in the Oxnard area, Will Gow's great-grandfather, Wong Ah Gow (see photo on the left) acted in many ways as intermediary between the Chinese and the larger white community. The presentation will discuss the role of the Chinese American community in relationship to other ethnic communities in and around Oxnard, while at the same time linking the history of that community to the larger Chinese American communities in Los Angeles and San Francisco. The presentation will show Oxnard's China Alley not as an isolated ghetto, but rather as an integrated part of the larger community.

Will Gow holds a Bachelors degree in Film Studies and History from New York University and a Master's degree in Asian American Studies from UCLA. He co-produced the Revisiting East Adams documentary and exhibit for the CHSSC in 2004. He is currently on the Board of Directors of CHSSC.

*("The Con Family" from page 1)*

Because of the contract any Chinese who entered Costa Rica was obligated to work in the construction of the railroad. Nevertheless, "the work contract opened the possibility of transferring the Chinese workers to other business owners in and out of the most populated area: the central Valley." The historians found that the abuse that the Chinese workers were subjected to amounted to quasi-slavery, "as their contracts were sold between 350 and 450 pesos, and in some cases, exchanged, borrowed, or announced in the newspapers as if they were animals or merchandise that could be acquired to the highest bidder." In addition to the difficult working conditions, Chinese immigrants were also victims of racial violence, scams, and subjects of hatred and curiosity from some sectors of Costa Rican society.

It was during that time Ernesto Con's great grandfather arrived in the port of Puntarenas, Costa Rica, in the final years of the 19th century. Ng-Takui, the teenage orphan from the poor village of Ah Con in Kwangtung Province of China, adopted the name of his village and became Gil Con.

In spite of his lack of a formal education and skills, he saved enough money toiling in menial jobs to go back to China and married the first of his three wives, Ernesto Con's great grandmother. The newlyweds relocated to Costa Rica and Gil con's wife adopted the name of Emilia Sánchez de Con. It was a common practice.

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## BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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*News 'n Notes Editor, Yvonne Chang*

## 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, multi-cultural society of the United States.



### AROUND CHSSC

#### CHSSC Board Director Honored



L to R: Assemblywoman Judy Chu, Jeannie Liu and Chun-Yen Chen, APWC executive director. Photo by Richard Liu.

CHSSC board member Jeannie Liu was presented the Asian Pacific Women's Center's Metamorphosis Award for Outstanding Volunteer at a special gala held Sept. 21 at Walt Disney Concert Hall. Jeannie was honored for the countless hours of translating she provides for the Asian Pacific Women's Center (APWC). APWC, founded in 1993, is a nonprofit organization dedicated to the development of affordable, transitional housing for women and children who are survivors of domestic violence.

Many of APWC's clients are recent immigrants who speak little English and do not understand their rights in the United States. Congratulations, Jeannie, for helping them to transition to new independent lives.

### Acknowledgements

The CHSSC thanks the following for their generosity:

- Margie Lew and Ben Fong for packing PoP books for delivery to schools and libraries throughout the country
- Ruth Lung, Winnie Lew, Johny and Esther Yee, JW Wong and Yvonne Chang for bringing snacks for the October 4th Program.
- Phil Hom for donating a Toshiba copier.
- Eugene Moy for lending his CPU to CHSSC.
- Frank Yee's donation of his 1985 Mercedes Benz brought CHSSC \$700. He also donated 12 folding chairs.

- Irvin Lai and Susan Dickson for representing CHSSC at every monthly Ad Hoc Meeting regarding the reburial issues of pioneer Chinese whose remains were found in the excavation by MTA near the Evergreen Cemetery in Boyle Heights.

### Wish List

- Two flat panel PC monitors.
- Telephone with conference call feature for the conference room.
- One man's and one woman's round form to display Chinese costumes.
- Two acrylic display cases measuring 18" x 18" x at least 12" H.
- Electrical parts for the acrylic display cases.
- Gardeners who are willing to travel to Chinatown to take care of CHSSC's gardening needs.
- Volunteer docents to give tours of Chinatown.

*(The Con Family" from page 2)*

Especially for Chinese women, because Costa Rica did not welcome them as immigrants.

Gil Con eventually made a fortune in Costa Rica but never forgot his Motherland nor his humble origin. He gave generously to the needy, the San Rafael Hospital and Puntarena's only orphanage. According to one of Ernesto's uncles in China that Gil Con gave half of his fortune to help finance the revolution that overthrew the Manchu Dynasty. He also donated money for the construction of the "Monument to the 72 Martyrs of the Yellow Flower Mound" in Guangzhou. Gil Con eventually sold all his businesses and properties in Costa Rica and returned to Ah Con where he died at the age of 68.

The Con family established themselves in Costa Rica. Ernesto Con's grandfather owned a grocery store, and like his father, became President of the Chinese Association of Puntarenas. During his tenure as President, he welcomed the American writer Pearl Buck, who came to pay a visit to the Chinese Association of Puntarenas. He died at 55 from a heart attack. Ernest Con relocated to Los Angeles with the intent of studying medicine at UCLA but decided to become a businessman and poet instead.

Reference: "La inmigración china a Costa Rica. Entre la explotación y la exclusión (1870-1910)" por Marlene Loría y Alfonso Chaves.



### HISTORICAL CHINATOWNS

#### The Pioneer Chinese of Utah in the Late 19th Century

By Yvonne Chang

The construction of the Central Pacific from Sacramento to Promontory brought the first Chinese into Utah. At one point there were more than 12,000 Chinese employed in the building of the Central Pacific. At first there was resistance in hiring Chinese by the construction superintendent, J. H. Strobridge. But labor shortage forced him to experiment with fifty Chinese workers. The Chinese proved to be excellent workers that restrictions on hiring Chinese were lifted.

Leland Stanford, the governor of California and one of "Big Four" railroad bosses, wrote to Andrew Johnson:

As a class they re quiet, peaceable, patient, industrious, and economical. Ready and apt to learn all the different kinds of work required in railroad building, they soon become as efficient as white laborers.

The Chinese workers in Utah laid track with precision consistently and performed dangerous work such as blasting of tunnels and ridges with nitroglycerin while lowered in baskets over cliffs fourteen hundred feet above the American River Canyon. The food the Chinese workers ate was also deemed more healthy than the typical American diet of meat and potatoes.

The Chinese railroad workers in Utah participated in the final joining of the Central Pacific and the Union Pacific at the Promontory, known as the Golden Spike.

The contribution of the Chinese on that occasion was not mentioned in the celebration in Sacramento except for a remark by Charles Crocker. In his speech he said, "In the midst of our rejoicing, I wish to call to mind that the early completion of this railroad we have built has been in great measure due to the poor, destitute class of laborers called Chinese—to the fidelity and industry they have shown..."

On the centennial of the memorable event at Promontory, May 10, 1969, Secretary of the Treasury John Volpe made a speech that did not mention the monumental task and genius of the Chinese railroad workers

Promontory became the gateway for most Chinese coming into Utah starting in 1870. They were employed almost entirely as section hands on the railroad working under Irish section heads. Wallace Clay, son of a telegraph operator and a Central Pacific agent at Blue Creek observed the day to day lives of these workers. He observed that

after twelve-hour shifts on the railroad, these men who conquered some of the most rugged terrain they let their thoughts turn toward their families. Clay said that he often saw them "writing long letters back home to China wherein they used little paint brushes to make their Chinese hieroglyphics or picture writing." Clay also observed that the Chinese preferred two music instruments, the *lo* (large gong) and a two stringed fiddle. He thought the familiar sound of these instruments must have eased loneliness for them.

Corinne, a once-booming railroad center, had a Chinese community that included a laundry that is now among the memorabilia housed in the railroad museum there. The *Utah Reporter* reported the first known Chinese wedding in Corinne where guests included Caucasians.

Terrace, now a ghost town, located about one hundred miles west of Promontory, also had a Chinese community in frontier days. According to the 1880 Census there were fifty-four Chinese in Terrace, only one of whom was a woman. Most of them were railroad employees, others were independent small businessmen who could read and write.

Ogden, the railroad center for Utah, also had a "Chinatown." Census figures show that there were thirty three Chinese in 1880 and one hundred six in 1890. Wong Leung Ka, a merchant, arrived in Ogden without his wife or children, lived there for forty-six years according to his son Wong Siu Pang of Salt Lake City. Wong Siu Pang has never known his father and learned of him through family members, mostly from an older brother. His store in Ogden carried groceries, canned goods, and Chinese imported items. He lived above the store and was known for his generosity. He provided sleeping rooms and meals to men who found themselves in difficult circumstances due to lack of work.

Park City, a once famous mining town, also boasted a Chinatown of 131 residents. Echo and Park City Railroad Company dismissed all workers and replaced them with Chinese workers whose pay was below that of those dismissed.

The pioneer Chinese in Utah were generally tolerated because they provided services and were viewed as peaceful people by the mainstream. But there were some incidents of racial prejudice.

As railroad work diminished many Chinese relocated to Salt Lake City. The 1890 Census reported 271 Chinese in Salt Lake City.

Reference: Don C. Conley, *People of Utah*,  
<http://historytogo.utah.gov>



**OCTOBER 2006**

## **2006 Fall Dinner**

Sunday, November 12, 2006

**6:00 p.m.**

**Empress Pavilion**

*Keynote Speakers*

Doctors Kwan Ming Chan and Karen Chan

**“Da Vinci Code” of the Ancient Kong Chow Temple**  
**A discussion on the spirit of the pioneers**



L to R: Kwan Ming Chan, Karen Chan

Los Angeles is a major port of entry for the early immigrants from the province of Guangdong. Most of them were from Wu Yi or Kong Chow districts. The name of Kong Chow was chosen by the Great Qin and Sui Dynasties to cover the Pearl River Estuary region. These pioneers were called Uncle Golden Mountain in their homeland.

The talk and the slide presentation will be **bilingual, both in English and Chinese**. The cost is \$50 per seat, or \$500, \$1,000, \$2,000, \$3,000 per table. Reservation forms have been mailed to all current members. For further information please call CHSSC, 323-222-0856, or email to [chssc@earthlink.net](mailto:chssc@earthlink.net).

There will also be entertainment by The Kong Chow Choir, founded about 10 years ago is operated by the Ladies Auxiliary of the Kong Chow Benevolent Association. Besides the popular songs, they have also practiced the Cantonese Opera, folk songs, English songs and Hong Kong lyrics. Some members are extremely talented in western cowboy music. In 2005 the choir was awarded a plaque for their successful performance.



### HEALTH & WELLNESS



By Dr. Betty Gaw

#### SENIOR MOMENT—Part II of II

##### The Twelve Warning Signs of Alzheimer's Disease

Increasing frequency of senior moments may be the early signs of Alzheimer's disease. There is an epidemic of this brain disorder, since more people are living to age 80 and beyond. The incidence is about 45% for octogenarians. Here are the signs as published by the Alzheimer's prevention Foundation and the Alzheimer's Foundation of America. [www.alzheimersprevention.org](http://www.alzheimersprevention.org). Phone: 520-749-8374.

1. Trouble with new memories or learning new concepts.
2. Relying on memory helpers progressively.
3. Trouble finding words.
4. Struggling to complete familiar actions or tasks.
5. Confusion about time, place, or people.
6. Misplacing familiar objects, repeatedly.
7. Onset of new depression or irritability.
8. Making bad decisions and not recognizing it.
9. Personality changes, tantrums unprovoked.
10. Loss of interest and initiative in important responsibilities.
11. Seeing or hearing things not there.
12. Expressing false beliefs. Delusions are common afflictions.

##### Testing to Rule In or Rule Out Alzheimer's Disease

See a neurologist who specializes in Alzheimer's Disease. The Third Annual Tucson Memory Screening is set for Tuesday, November 14, 2006. Call to enroll for your baseline test score.

##### Pillars of Prevention

1. Diet and vitamins to nourish the demanding brain for its optimal functions. Eat more antioxidants, less saturated fats, avoid all hydrogenated vegetable oils/fats, less

carbohydrates and no high fructose corn syrup. Practice calorie restriction, build muscle, reduce fat, avoid obesity and emotional binging on food. Must hydrate throughout the waking hours.

2. Stress management. Uncontrolled or unrelieved stress kills.
3. Exercise, but do it moderately. Heavy or prolonged exercise cause stress injuries, depletes nutrients and increases cell-damaging free radicals.
4. Pharmaceuticals. Medications and hormones as prescribed by your physician in the early-moderate stage of the disease may halt its progression.
5. Nutraceuticals, such as fish oil or Omega-3's as found in docosahexaenoic acid/DHA is food that promotes brain development at any age and need be supplemented, PhosphatidylSerine/PS ( PS is usually found in high concentrations in the neurons, but unfortunately it declines as we age), and GlyceroPhosphoCholine/GPC may be helpful in the early-moderate stages of Alzheimer's Disease. Dr. Parris Kidd, PhD. recommends his brain enhancing formula, and found that PS also helps the cognitive functions of young students.
6. Music and Meditation.
7. Form social net works; bonding relationships build the brain. Help others.
8. Keep on learning to exercise the brain synapses. The "Nintendo DS Game Player" for \$130 may be a nice toy to challenge the brain, as is "Brain Age", \$20 developed by Ryuta Kawashima, M.D., or "Big Brain Academy". Doing cross- word puzzles help develop vocabulary. For seniors, focus and concentration are aids to memory, multi-tasking is a deterrent.

No matter what your age is, senior moments are real, are frustrating, but can be reversed except at its end-stage of severity when more than 70 % of the neurons are destroyed. What do we do with a body that has lost its memory and unique human personality? Prevention is the only solution, therefore we must educate ourselves and our children to stay healthy all our lives, in order to avoid this devastating, mind-tormenting disease, dementia. In Sun Tzu's book, THE ART of WAR, written in the 6th. Century B.C., China, he advocates, "Be skillful in your defense. You must use all your skill to control the enemy." So too, armed with knowledge and strategy, we can conquer dementia. Life is gloriously beautiful when you have cognitive vim, vigor and vitality to achieve your aspirations, dreams and passions in a whole lifetime.

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### COMMUNITY CALENDAR

Ongoing

#### **BONE MARROW DRIVES by ASIANS FOR MIRACLE MARROW MATCHES**

Various locations throughout L.A. area

Information: (888) 236-4673; [www.asianmarrow.org](http://www.asianmarrow.org)

Thursdays, 3:00-7:00 p.m.

#### **CHINATOWN FARMERS MARKET**

727 N. Hill St., L.A. Chinatown

Information: (213) 680-0243; [www.chinatownla.com](http://www.chinatownla.com)

First Saturday of Every Month, 10:30 a.m.

#### **“UNDISCOVERED CHINATOWN” TOURS**

L.A. Chinatown

Information: (213) 680-0243; [www.chinatownla.com](http://www.chinatownla.com)

November 4th and 5th, 2007, 9:00—5:00

**Autumn Festival** with traditions and cultures of China, Korea, Japan and Philippines.

Aquarium of the Pacific

320 Golden Shore

Long Beach, CA

Free with museum admission

562-590-3100

November 9th

Media Action Network for Asian Americans (MANAA)

#### **Awards Banquet**

USC Town & Gown

213-486-4433

November 10<sup>th</sup> to February 4, 2007

#### **Banquet — A Feast for the Senses Exhibition**

Pacific Asia Museum,

46 N. Las Robles Ave., Pasadena

\$7 for non-members, free for members

Reservation required: (626) 449-2742, ext. 12

November 12th, 2:00 p.m.

Authors on Asia at Pacific Asia Museum

#### **Chinese Food Finder: Los Angeles and the San Gabriel Valley by Carl Chu**

Carl Chu has written the area's definitive Chinese restaurant guide on what to order and where to go to find

representative dishes from every region of China, and vital information on the culture of Chinese dining.

November 17th

#### **Chinatown Service Center Banquet**

Westin Bonaventure

November 18th, 7:30 p.m.

#### **Cold Tofu Comedy** improvisational performance

Maryknoll Japanese Catholic Center

222 S. Hewitt

Little Tokyo

Cost—donation

November 25, 9:00—4:00

#### **Annual Ho'oulu Lahui Hawaiian Craft & Cultural Fair**

Carson Community Center

801 E. Carson Street

Free

213-473-7723



**\$100 Could Put You in the Driver's Seat  
Of a Brand New MAZDA3!**

NOW...for a **\$100 tax-deductible donation** to CHSSC, the odds are 1 in 500 for you to win a new 2006 four-door MAZDA3...sporting **great looks** and even **better performance**.

Drawing will be held November 25, 2006. Winner need not be present to win. If 151-250 tickets are sold, Prize: \$2,000. If 51 -150 tickets are sold, prize: \$1,000, Winner is responsible for all taxes, fees and licensing.

To pay by cash, check or money order payable to CHSSC , please complete this form and mail with payment to 415 Bernard St., Los Angeles, CA 90012.

Or to pay by Visa/MC, complete and fax this form to CHSSC: 323-221-4162.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
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Credit Card # \_\_\_\_\_

Exp. Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Tel.: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Number of tickets: \_\_\_\_\_ Amount: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_



**Chinese Historical Society  
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Los Angeles, CA 90012-1703**

