



NEWS 'n NOTES

CHINESE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

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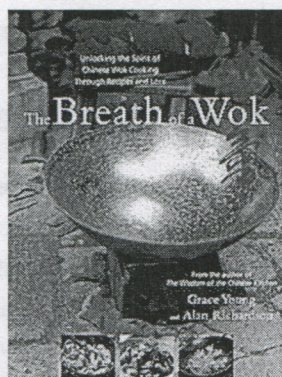
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Chinatown Heritage & Visitors Center: 323-222-1918

SEPTEMBER 2004

THE BREATH OF A WOK

Author, GRACE YOUNG



WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 6, 2004, 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)

Food writer and culinary expert Grace Young has written: "There is no greater piece of kitchen equipment than a wok. Certainly, it is the most versatile, and far exceeds any range of techniques that can be accomplished by a pot or skillet. However, few people are able to master cooking with a wok to its utmost potential."

PLEASE JOIN US ON OCTOBER 6TH, as IACP International Cookbook Award winner Grace Young shares secrets of wok cooking from the newly-published volume, *THE BREATH OF A WOK: Unlocking the Secrets of Chinese Wok Cooking Through Recipes and Lore* (Simon & Schuster, September 2, 2004). The author will sign her new book at the meeting.

Grace Young grew up as a first generation Chinese American in San Francisco. After purchasing her first wok in college and finding herself with a "slightly rusted cooking utensil" that food stuck to when she stir-fried, Young's father taught her the fineries of wok cooking and to respect the art of *wok hay*, which is "the prized, elusive, seared taste that comes only from cooking in a wok."

Those interested may join the author for a 6:00 p.m. no-host dinner at Big China Restaurant, one block from Castelar School, at 911 N. Broadway.

AROUND CHSSC

THE MAGIC OF CHINA CITY WITH PAUL LOUIE

By Susie Ling



Emma and Paul Louie, CHSSC
President Kenneth L. Chan, 9/8/04

China City is a unique ethnic community in American history. Los Angeles developers, Christine Sterling and Harry Chandler, planned it to be a tourist attraction with moongates, rickshaws, and fortune tellers. The design sets from the film classic, *The Good Earth*, were actually used to build China City. Maybe it was intended to be a stereotype, but China City became

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DELBERT WONG: FIRST CHINESE AMERICAN JUDGE

By Linda Chong



CAM Board Member Al Soo Hoo, Kent Wong, CAM Curator Suellen Cheng, Marshall Wong, CHSSC V.P. Programs Eugene Moy, Judge Delbert and Dolores Wong (Marshall Wong photo)

Few acts of reverence or filial piety equal that of a loving son writing his father's biography.

On the sweltering Saturday afternoon of August 21st, more than 100 people packed into the Garnier Block's Hellman-Quon Building—adjacent to the Chinese American Museum—for a reception and book signing honoring Delbert Wong, the first U.S. judge of Chinese ancestry. The gathering celebrated the recent publication of the pioneering jurist's biography, written by his son, Marshall, coordinator of anti-hate crime programs for the Los Angeles County Commission on Human Relations.

The Chinese Historical Society and Chinese American Museum (CAM) co-sponsored the event which was crowded enough to leave only standing room for some well-wishers. CAM Curator Suellen Cheng introduced CHSSC President Kenneth L. Chan, and President of the Friends of CAM Terry Loo. The Southern California Chinese Lawyers Association represented the legal profession and community, of which Judge Wong was truly a pioneer. (The retired Los Angeles Superior Court Judge was only the second Chinese American lawyer in Southern California when he moved to Los Angeles in 1951.)

The showing of a video interview by son Marshall (who is named after former U.S. Supreme Court Chief Justice, John Marshall) on Judge Wong's life and career in jurisprudence highlighted the afternoon. Marshall Wong shared how documenting his father's history taught him vastly more about the person he spent his entire life watching and studying. He talked of how his father has inspired him personally.

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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, multi-cultural society of the United States.



(China City, from page 1)

much more. Its Chinese American residents made it a celebration of Chinese culture and infused it with a unique community spirit. Ruby Ling Louie summarized this symbiotic relationship, "My father loved to do Chinese theater. It wasn't an act. [China City] was a wonderful place with wonderful people." China City was built after LA's "Old Chinatown" was demolished in 1938-39. China City, sandwiched by Ord, Main, Macy, and Spring, suffered devastating fires in 1948 but the decade in between is not forgotten.

About 125 people came to CHSSC's September General Meeting at Castelar School to celebrate China City. Paul Louie showed slides and stimulated residents to tell their special stories. Gim Fong told of his oldest brother, Ming Kuen Fong, painting the two murals on the East Gateway Entrance. Marian Leng's uncle ran the Golden Lantern restaurant and her daughters—like other residents—were extras in the films, *Left Hand of God*, *The King and I*, and *China Gate*. Johnny Yee guarded the Kuan Yin Temple. Dressed in Chinese garb, young Johnny would help tourists light incense, "I got paid 50 cents a day. In the summer, I got a dollar per day." As a cute young teen nicknamed "Dimples", Richard Lee Sung swept the plaza courtyard for 25 cents, taught tourists to use chopsticks, and helped make China City's infamous "Fook Gay's China Burger." Everyone remembered visits to China City from Eleanor Roosevelt, William Holden, Cary Grant, Barbara Stanwyck, Judy Garland, Anna May Wong, and other celebrities.

China City not only provided affordable business opportunities for Chinese Americans, it even opened the door to Hollywood. But the atmosphere of China City also allowed immigrants to show off their rich traditional culture including customs, fashion, art, music, martial arts, architecture, and—of course—food. Chinese pioneers must have been proud to raise their families in this unique cultural milieu during the difficult war years.

The September program was also an opportunity for CHSSC to welcome back its beloved founding member, Paul Louie, and his wife, Emma. Paul and Emma's former home in Los Angeles was the CHSSC headquarters and meeting place for many years. It is befitting that Munson Kwok and Irvin Lai presented a motion—unanimously passed by the general body—to make Paul Louie the Chinese Historical Society of Southern California's first "Honorary Member." Congresswoman Lucille Roybal-Allard and Councilman Ed Reyes' offices also presented certificates of appreciation. Thanks, Paul and Emma, for the many many years of vision and dedication. *N/V*

(Judge Delbert Wong, from page 2)

After graduating from Stanford Law School in 1948, Delbert Wong served in the Office of the Legislative Counsel in Sacramento and later the California Attorney General's office. Judge Wong's 1959 appointment was a directive of former California Governor Edmund G. Brown who, while on the campaign trail, voiced his intention to appoint more Asian-American judges. The appointment of Judge Wong, who developed a reputation as a fair and compassionate jurist, made front-page news when announced.

During his decorated career, Judge Wong served for 3 years at the Municipal Court level and for 20 years as a Superior Court judge. He stated that his most memorable cases were heard between 1968 and 1972 during what he called "the Vietnam War era." Among his valuable life lessons, he said, was finding the resolve to be the sole voice of dissent—the one who might cast the "lone, dissenting vote" on a legal matter.

Judge Wong said his second-best decision in life was attending law school and his best was marrying wife Dolores. The couple celebrated their 56th anniversary recently. Despite official retirement in 1982, the 84-year-old jurist continues serving on the Los Angeles Superior Court Arbitration Panel. In *Delbert Wong: First Chinese American Judge*, Marshall Wong writes: "for half a century, nothing else has seemed more gratifying than the practice of law."

CHSSC'S WILLIAM CHEW ADDRESSES RAYTHEON ASIAN PACIFIC AMERICAN HERITAGE CELEBRATION

By Wing Mar, MD

Society Vice President, William F. Chew was keynote speaker at the mid-June Raytheon Asian Pacific American Heritage (RAPA) Celebration. Raytheon Company is a multi-national conglomerate in the aerospace and defense industries with 78,000 employees worldwide and large facilities locally in Torrance and El Segundo.

Bill spoke at the noon hour in the El Segundo facility's spacious auditorium. Introductory performance by taiko drummers and tai chi kung fu artists were professionally and excellently done. Bill Chew followed and delivered a most inspiring talk on his lifelong aerospace career, his volunteer, post-retirement life with the Chinese Historical Society of Southern California, and his book *Nameless Builders of the Transcontinental Railroad*. Young professionals in the audience were obviously moved by Bill's story. An atrium display of *Portraits of Pride (PoP)* panels of high achieving Chinese Americans in defense and science created a context for Bill's address. (Continued on page 4)



(Bill Chew at Raytheon, from page 3)

Bill Chew's talk wove it all together with historical depth and a sense of humor. The goals of RAPA and CHSSC were well-served by his speech and presentation. Raytheon administrative staff generously thanked the CHSSC vice-president and organizers of the heritage celebration for their ongoing contributions to Raytheon's success as a truly diverse working community. I attended the event as an organizer and guest, proudly representing CHSSC, and set up *Portraits of Pride* display panels and fielded questions about the *PoP* project. Bill's talk, in addition to helping infuse the RAPA event with even greater significance, will hopefully gain some new CHSSC corporate and individual members!

ANNOUNCEMENTS

WELCOME, NEW CHSSC MEMBERS!!!

On behalf of CHSSC President Kenneth L. Chan, Membership Secretary Philip Tong and the CHSSC Board, we extend our warmest welcome to the following new members: Larry Bond, Mary Chow, Teresa Cortey, Richard Davidon, Susan Flanagan, Joe & Joan Fong, Rachel Halbert, Chris Hausman, Hong Huynh, Victoria Jones, Keith Kresge, Beth Leder-Pack, Lily O. Lew, Steve Lipshie, Cindy Liu, Lani P. Mar, Susan Myren, Jeff Riekenberg, Bo-Gay Tong Salvador, Mel B. Schafer, Lorena Tong, Nancy Tsao and Anita Wong.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR SERVICE TO CHSSC

A very special thank you to Gilbert Hom and Phillip Hom for hours spent installing a new air conditioning system at our Bernard Street properties, gardening and maintenance of the Chinese Memorial Shrine historical monument, assembling Office furniture, newsletter production, and tasks too numerous to mention here.

A special thank you also to our general meeting volunteers who arrive early, put in hours setting up the snack tables, manage and oversee them, and break them down after the meetings. We really appreciate all you do.

News 'n Notes thanks Donna Young who took on the task of compiling entries for the newsletter's Community Calendar.

SEPTEMBER GENERAL MEETING SNACK DONATIONS

The Society thanks Lupe and Marshall Chee, Natalina Chew, Winston Gin, Mary Yee Kwok, Ruth Lung, Judge Delbert and Dolores Wong, Frieda Wong, Johnny and Esther Yee, and Donna Young for the delicious snacks they provided for the September General Meeting.

IT'S TIME TO RENEW YOUR CHSSC MEMBERSHIP!

It's CHSSC membership renewal time. Please add \$10 if you wish to receive our newly-expanded, scholarly *Gum Saan Journal*. Please mail checks to the CHSSC Office at 415 Bernard Street, Los Angeles, CA 90012-1703.

LANDSCAPING PROJECT SUPPORT

CHSSC Board member Jeannie Liu has joined the Landscape Committee to assist Dr. Betty Gaw, project chair. More volunteers are welcome and needed. Please contact Dr. Gaw by email at bettycgaw@hotmail.com or contact CHSSC by phone: (213-222-0856) or email: (chssc@earthlink.net).

The Landscaping Committee acknowledges the generous donation of Dorothy Fue Wong—given in loving memory of Mr. Milton Lai Lee—the first such donation since the Landscape Project was recently re-initiated. We encourage other members to support this effort to beautify our facilities through their generous donations. Please send your gifts to Landscaping Project, CHSSC, 415 Bernard Street, Los Angeles, CA 90012-1703.

MONTHLY NEWS 'N NOTES IN YOUR EMAIL BOX

If you would consider receiving our monthly newsletter by email, please send a request to chssc@earthlink.net. The cancellation of your hard copy subscription will save the Society a few dimes and save the environment a few branches.

CHINESE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF AMERICA CHINESE AMERICAN MIGRATION HISTORY TOUR

December 29, 2004 through January 16, 2005, Professor Marlon Hom of San Francisco State University Asian American Studies will lead a travel-study program to Southern China. Focus will be on trans-Pacific Chinese American cultural linkage and

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(Announcements, from page 4)

ancestral heritage. For tour information, please contact Jeannie Woo at (415) 391-1188 x 103 (jwoo@chsa.org); or Marlon Hom at (415) 338-2699 (mhom@sfsu.edu).

BOARD OF DIRECTORS' MEMBERSHIP DRIVE COMPETITION

Our Board members are vying with each other in a lively competition to increase our membership base. The results to date are as follows:

Donna Young:	12;
Jack Ong	4;
Dr. Betty Gaw:	3;
Kenneth L. Chan	2;
Philip Tong	2;
Jeannie Liu	1;

Bill Chew: 0; Eugene Moy: 0; Ben Nakayama: 0; Howard Fong: 0; Dr. Don Loo: 0; Dr. Albert Chang: 0; Susan Hum: 0; Dr. Munson Kwok: 0; Dr. Wing Mar: 0; Frank Yee: 0; and, Mary Yee Kwok: 0.

We encourage our members to support the drive by recruiting new members and contacting former ones whose memberships may have lapsed. Thank you!

NEW PORTRAITS OF PRIDE PANELS ADDED TO CHSSC HERITAGE & VISITORS CENTER PERMANENT EXHIBIT

Eleven additional *Portraits of Pride* (PoP) panels were recently hung in a gallery room in the CHSSC Heritage Center. The PoP panels celebrate WWII-generation Chinese Americans of great achievement in the health, science and defense fields. Newly profiled are: Milly Liu, M.D., FAAP; Julius Sue, M.D.; Luther Lee, Jr., B.S., M.E.; Timothy Chew, B.S.; Paul & Emma Louie; Philip Choy, B.A.; Annie Chin Siu, D.D.S.; Thomas Woo, B.A.; Ruby Kwong Lee, B.S.; Tung-Hua Lin, D.Sc.; and, Gaing Chan, M.D. In mid-November, the City of Los Angeles will host a major display exhibit of *Portraits of Pride* panels in its City Hall Bridge Gallery.

ANGELS WALK L.A. "STANCHION" INSTALLED AT HERITAGE AND VISITORS CENTER

On August 3rd, an Angels Walk L.A. stanchion was set in concrete at 411 Bernard Street. Merriam

Webster defines *stanchion* as "an upright post, bar or support." The Angels Walk stanchions are 12-foot-high mini-towers embedded in sidewalks for the enjoyment and edification of pedestrians. The small towers chronicle the history of Los Angeles' most historic neighborhoods by fusing historic photographs and short text narratives into colorful and informative storytelling montages. In design, the *Streamline Moderne* stanchions are miniaturizations of Los Angeles' historic Pan Pacific Auditorium's spires. The CHSSC Heritage Center stanchion tells the history of our two Victorian homes; Louise Fritz Whiting, who lived in one of the houses for her entire lifetime; the Los Angeles Aqueduct; and, the *Zanja Madre*, or "Mother Ditch," of the original Los Angeles water system. Last month, sixteen Angels Walk stanchions were installed in Chinatown. Other historic districts with stanchion clusters are in Downtown Los Angeles, Wilshire Center, and several towers will be installed in the Figueroa Corridor in 2005.

COMMUNITY CALENDAR

Through October 17th, Sunday

TYRUS WONG: A RETROSPECTIVE

Chinese American Museum
425 N. Los Angeles St.
El Pueblo State Park at Olvera Street, L.A.
Information: (213) 626-5240; www.camla.org

Through October 31st, Sunday

MID-CENTURY MANDARIN: CLAY CANVASES OF TYRUS YU WONG; KINETIC CREATURES: ART KITES OF TYRUS YU WONG

Craft and Folk Art Museum
5814 Wilshire Blvd., L.A.
Information: (323) 937-4230; www.cafam.org

October 2nd, Saturday, Noon-6:00 p.m.

25th ANNUAL MOON FESTIVAL; TEMPLE AND MUSEUM TOURS

China Alley, Hanford
Information: (559) 582-4508

October 3rd, Sunday, 7:00 p.m.

ASIANS FOR MIRACLE MARROW MATCHES CONCERT WITH AHN TRIO

Cerritos Center for the Performing Arts
12700 Center Court Dr., Cerritos
Information: (888) A3M-HOPE; www.asianmarrow.org

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(Community Calendar, from page 5)

October 6th, Wednesday, 7:00 p.m.

AUTHOR GISH JEN ON "THE LOVE WIFE"

October 15th, Friday, 7:00 p.m.

AUTHOR HAN ONG ON "THE DISINHERITED"

October 17th, Sunday, 1:00 p.m.

AUTHOR GILLIAN GREEN ON "TRADITIONAL TEXTILES OF CAMBODIA: CULTURAL THREADS AND MATERIAL HERITAGE"

Pacific Asia Museum

46 N. Los Robles Ave., Pasadena

Information: (626) 449-2742 x20; www.pacificasiamuseum.org

October 13th, 6:30 p.m.

TIGER CHASE – A BOOK REVIEW BY ANDREW MCDERMOTT

Chinatown Branch Library, www.lapl.org/branches/63.html

October 16th, Saturday, 3:00 p.m. or 7:00 p.m.

AN EVENING WITH NANCY KWAN & JAMES SHIGETA IN "LOVE LETTERS"

David Henry Hwang Theater

120 Judge John Aiso St., Little Tokyo

Information: (213) 625-7000 x17; www.eastwestplayers.org

October 21st, Thursday, 6:00 p.m.

ANGEL ISLAND IMMIGRATION STATION FOUNDATION ANNUAL DINNER:

"THE LOTUS CLUB... WHERE DREAMS UNFOLD"

Empress of China Restaurant

888 Grant Ave., San Francisco Chinatown

Information: (415) 561-2160; www.aiisf.org

October 22nd, Friday, 6:30 p.m.

ASIAN PACIFIC WOMEN'S CENTER ANNUAL METAMORPHOSIS GALA

Traxx Restaurant

Union Station, L.A.

Information: (310) 907-1000; www.apwcla.org

October 28th, Thursday, 7:00 p.m.

ASIAN PACIFIC AMERICAN LEGAL CENTER 21ST ANNIVERSARY AWARDS DINNER & SILENT AUCTION

Empress Pavilion Restaurant

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

Information: (213) 241-0201; www.apalc.org

October 29th, Friday, 7:00 p.m.

ASIAN YOUTH CENTER 15TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION DINNER

Westin Bonaventure Hotel

404 S. Figueroa St., L.A. Information: (626) 309-0622; www.asianyouthcenter.org

November 2nd, Tuesday – **VOTE!**

November 4th, Thursday, 5:30 p.m.

ASIAN BUSINESS LEAGUE 20TH ANNUAL AWARDS DINNER

Omni Hotel

251 S. Olive St., L.A.

Information: (213) 624-9975; www.ablsc.org

November 13th, Saturday, 6:00 p.m.

CHSSC ANNUAL FALL DINNER: "PORTRAITS OF PRIDE"

Empress Pavilion Restaurant

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

Information: (323) 222-0856; www.chssc.org

HEALTH & WELLNESS

GOOD FATS AND BAD FATS



By Dr. Betty Gaw

Our stone-age ancestors hunted and gathered food, eating whatever they could find. When food was plentiful, they had their fill, but when it was scarce, they went hungry. Thus, thousands of years ago, obesity was non-existent because human genes evolved to adapt to cycles of feast and famine. Fast forward to the United States in the twenty-first century—where food is abundant, inexpensive, processed, packaged and purified—and the result is sixty percent of modern-day adults and twenty percent of children are overweight or obese from consuming unhealthy foods and too many calories for their sedentary lifestyles.

A gram of fat or oil supplies 9 calories of food energy, whereas one gram of carbohydrate provides 4 calories. Therefore, consuming fats accelerates fat accumulation and makes us gain weight through eating hamburgers, French fries, potato chips, bacon, ice cream, or marbled fatty steak. Fats are storage deposits of energy that must be available during periods of feast, famine, or illness.

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(*Fats, from page 6*)

They also help food taste smooth and palatable and give us satiety—the feeling we have eaten enough. On the down side, fat tissue in the human body is a depository for toxic chemicals such as xenoestrogens which are potent estrogens emitted by plastics that interfere with our natural hormones. Polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), Dioxins and Bisphenol A (BPA) damage chromosomes, causing miscarriages, enlargement of the prostate gland, decreased sperm count and early puberty in children. A host of fat-soluble toxins cause DNA damage, leading to cancer, Alzheimer's Disease, Parkinson's Disease and other life-threatening conditions. Before undergoing major surgery, be sure to reduce weight and shed fat because fat consists of globules of cells with sparse blood circulation, slowing wound healing and immune functions.

Hydrogenated Vegetable Oils

Trans fatty acids are manufactured through hydrogenation by pumping hydrogen into liquid vegetable oils to transform them into solid fats, thus increasing their shelf life. Vegetable shortening and margarine were created to replace harmful saturated animal fats. Ironically, in the 1990's, researchers determined that trans fats are metabolized as saturated fats and actually increase artery-clogging triglycerides, LDL and lipoprotein-a, and damaging free radicals. Whereas animal saturated fat raises good cholesterol HDL, trans fats do not, so they are a less healthy fat to ingest. The American diet is rich in trans fats which are found in cookies, cakes, bread, salad dressing, ice cream, crackers and frying oils. It is dismaying that so many of our foods contain these cardiovascular-damaging oils. It is estimated that 70% of our foods contain such fats. No wonder heart disease is the number-one killer in the United States. The general public is ignorant of trans fatty acids, as evidenced last year when several people were interviewed after a lawsuit was filed against the Oreo Cookie Company. The complainant hoped to enlighten the public that consuming trans fat kills silently and slowly. The lawsuit, however, was withdrawn before it could be litigated, and Oreo Cookies are still laden with trans fat!

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(*Continued Next Month.*)

LOS ANGELES' MYSTERIOUS CHINESE TUNNELS

By Don Sloper

The Chinese tunnels are one of the most persistent urban myths in the City of Los Angeles. Veteran docents for Las Angelitas del Pueblo, the volunteer organization that leads free tours of the plaza area, encounter people who ask to see the tunnels. When told they don't exist, people can become quite demanding and state they have been in them. In at least one case, people walked away and stated they weren't interested in a tour if it didn't include the Chinese tunnels. So what is the origin of this myth?

The Old Building Foundations and the 1960's Tunnel

The foundations for early Los Angeles buildings were built by digging a trench, then piling up rocks. Two buildings which had this type of foundation for their basements are the Merced Theater, built in 1870, and the Garnier Block, built by Philippe Garnier, a Frenchman, in 1890. The Garnier block, which housed Chinese business establishments and volunteer organizations, is the present location of the Chinese-American Museum.

In the Garnier Building as in other commercial buildings of the era, the basements were often subdivided with partitions between various tenants, but often a basement had connecting doors between partitions. In the 1960's—long after the Chinese had left the Plaza—the park authorities built a utility tunnel between the Merced Theater and the Garnier Building.

What Happened Next

The Plaza is a noisy place and trips to the basements were always entertaining to school children. Since fourth grade is the year for local history, many touring the Plaza are elementary school children. When tours of the Plaza started in the late 1960's, the docents would enter the basement of the Merced Theater.

Picture the situation: you go down a narrow stairway, the docent used a flashlight because there were few or no lights, the basements were spooky with cobwebs and rough rock walls (remember the round stones; they left lots of space for dust and spiders to collect). The basements are subdivided into rooms and passageways, so the docent would

(*Continued on page 8*)

(Tunnels, from Page 7)

issue dire warnings, particularly to school children, not to wander off into the dark. Eventually, the tour group would go through the 1960's utility tunnel and into the basement of the Garnier Building, which looked a lot like the basement of the Merced Theater, then eventually emerge on the other side of Sanchez Alley from a different building than they had entered. The docent would talk about the Chinese occupants in the Garnier Block. When there were no children on the tour, conversation could include the city's Wild West heritage and the fact that there were formerly prostitution, gambling and opium dens in the Plaza Area. It took only a small leap of the imagination or a careless docent to make one believe they were in the secret Chinese tunnels that "everyone" knew existed. Since a basement is an uncommon rarity in Southern California real estate, going underground into a basement was a new experience for most tour goers, making it even easier to become confused.

The Tunnels Today

In 2003, to determine if the present tour options at El Pueblo could be expanded and also provide an alternative during rain, I entered the old Merced Theater through the utility tunnel and into the Garnier Building, following the former tour route. It occurred to me that adding this area to the present route would provide a fun experience and could be used to finally clear up the urban myth of the mysterious Chinese tunnels.

However, the Northridge earthquake in 1994 caused extensive damage to the old foundations in the Plaza area and to the buildings above them. Millions of dollars have been spent to save the buildings and, in the process, the basements are now largely reinforced concrete with steel beams and electric lights on motion detectors that turn on automatically with no flashlight required.

It's just not the same experience today, and current laws would require major retrofitting before tour groups could be taken into the basements. How truly disappointing!

(Don Sloper is a member of Las Angelitas del Pueblo, the volunteer docent organization that conducts approximately 12,000 tours a year of Los Angeles' historic El Pueblo area.)



Chinese Historical Society of Southern California

**415 Bernard St.
Los Angeles, CA 90012-1703**

