

APRIL 2020

Important Announcement: There will not be an April or May Monthly Meeting

See Community Calendar on back for more
cancellations.

March Monthly Meeting Recap

Jim and Philip Chiao gave a fascinating overview of Chinese workers in the fish canning industry. Jim started with his and Philip's personal history. Born in Taiwan, they moved at the age of 14 with their families to Africa, and attended Chinese school in Benghazi, Libya. Then they came to the U.S. to L.A. for a better education at age 16, went to Belmont High, then on to the University of Washington for Seattle. It was at university that they desperately sought a summer job, hoping to work in Alaska through the ILWU Union, which consisted of mostly Filipinos. After a month, they were dispatched to Alaska for their summer job working in a cannery. After retiring, Jim started to look back at their time in the cannery and started researching the history of Chinese workers in canneries. Jim asked Philip to join him in his research.

Jim and Philip gave a very detailed and fascinating overview of Chinese workers in canneries, starting from their arrival in the mid-1800's, to present day. They started with the Hume brothers, who pioneered the business of fishing and canning fish, as the only options for fish those days were fresh fish, or salted fish. There was a lot of experimentation in exactly how to process the fish, make the cans, and can the fish. Eventually, they succeeded in figuring out a feasible process to can the fish, but needed workers, which were hard to find as the canneries were generally located in isolated places. They put out an ad for workers and hired Chinese workers. With their success, copy-cats of the business formed that also hired Chinese workers. As the cannery business boomed, so did work for the Chinese who made up approximately 90% of the canning work force.

Nowadays, a can of fish is seen as cheap emergency food, but the process of canning fish in the 1800's was quite complicated. The Chiao brothers gave an



incredibly detailed overview of what it was actually like for the Chinese workers in the canneries, and the types of work they had to do. Given that we are living when most things are mechanized, it is hard to imagine that things used to be done by hand rather than machine. The tin cans had to be cut to shape, rolled, and the top and bottom soldered. The fish also had to be cut to fit in the can, another worker weighs and patches the can, "patched" meaning more salmon is added to bring up the weight of the can, another worker adds salt, and another soldered the cans. The cans were then dipped in hot water, and tested to see if bubbles came out of the can for any leaks so that the can could be repaired.

The Chiao brothers highlighted how the butcher was a very specialized job, as they would work very efficiently and very fast, and each cannery only hired a few of them. Canneries would only hire the minimum number of butchers required, as the number of fish coming in could be variable. If it was a good fishing season, butchers could work for 18 hours a day, nearly non-stop. As the butchers started to age, something was needed to replace them. The replacement was an invention by Edmond Smith, patented in 1903, called the "Iron Chink". The name of the machine comes off as insensitive and (Read the rest of this article on page 4.)



President's Letter

Normally the April newsletter would be encouraging our members to support our organization by attending our yearly fundraising event, the Golden Spike Awards Dinner. Times during the pandemic of COVID-19 are far from normal. Since the safety and well-being of our membership is our top priority, we have cancelled the Awards Dinner, as well as both the April and May Monthly Meetings, and also our Ching Ming event at Evergreen Cemetery.

CHSSC remains dedicated to our mission. Our staff is currently working at home, so there will be a delay in responses to phone messages. Our interns are working remotely. Our UCLA intern who works with our archives is working from campus. Our two UC Riverside interns who are working with the Chinese Immigration files at the National Archives are learning how to remotely complete the spreadsheets with the files from Nogales. CHSSC has received an LA as Subject grant, for which, in April, a resident USC archivist will begin aiding us in managing our digital archives. Our plans to hold the annual pilgrimage to Yosemite have been postponed, this date is to be determined and will be announced at another time.

CHSSC remains optimistic for the future. We are monitoring the daily news and will keep you posted about when our Monthly Meetings will begin again. Please send us any updated email addresses, so that we can include you on our mailing list.

Stay safe,
Susan Dickson

Thank you to **Shirley Chu Ng, Sylvia So Hoo, Anita Lee, Doreen Nakayama, Winnie Lew, and Phoenix Bakery** for bringing snacks to share at our March Monthly Meeting!

Thank you to **Donna Leong** for her donation to our Visitor Center and a special thank you to **Lily Chen** for her generous donation!

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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.



APRIL 2020

February and March Outreach

February 2 - High Tech High School, interview and walking tour

Four 11th grade students from the SF Valley came to visit CHSSC on a Sunday, asked research questions, reviewed literature, and took some video in preparation for a documentary film to be submitted for the National History Competition. Their visit culminated with a Chinatown walking tour.

February 22 - OCA-GLA new board member Chinatown tour

Following the luncheon installation of new officers and board members (Albert Lu, Pres.) of the Organization of Chinese Americans-Greater Los Angeles Chapter, a dozen or so from the gathering hiked over to the Chinese American Museum, then came back to Chinatown for a walking and eating tour led by Eugene Moy.

February 27 - Judge Ronald S.W. Lew and Federal Courts Chinese New Year Luncheon

(pictured above) Judge Lew, a native of Los Angeles and the first (outside of Hawaii) Chinese American federal judge, annually organizes a Chinese New Year luncheon in Chinatown for his legal colleagues from the federal courts in L.A. This year, Eugene Moy was invited to make a presentation on the Chinese American Museum (Judge Lew, now senior district judge, is a past president of the Museum board), and on the role of early Chinese in building railroads and building America. The luncheon at the Golden Dragon was enjoyed by 100 attendees, including judges, attorneys, and court staff.

March 1 - USC Heritage Conservation students

A group of 8 students from USC's Master of Heritage Conservation program, led by Professor Meredith Drake Reitan, came to CHSSC and enjoyed an extended Chinatown walking tour to support their learning of community development, planning, and cultural heritage landmarking.



Photo Day at CHSSC

A small group of dedicated members gathered at CHSSC on February 29 to sort through hundreds of photos that had been donated by our members. This time our goal was to organize them into categories: meetings, field trips, dinners, Chinese New Year, Heritage Center, and Old Chinatown. Each photo jogged memories of old friends, other times, and other places. Our next step will be to take one category at a time to identify each photo. Maybe you can join us for our next Photo Day.



Back row, L-R: Eugene Moy, Mei Ong, Susan Dickson, Linda Bentz, Chong Lew; front, L-R: Cindy Fong, Susan Sing



APRIL 2020

NOTICE: 2020 YOSEMITE-SING PEAK PILGRIMAGE POSTPONED

Your planning team has been working for a while on the itinerary for our annual trip to explore one of our great national treasures. An outline schedule has been prepared, rangers and speakers have been scheduled, cabins have been reserved, and this month we would have been taking cabin and bed reservations. But given the COVID-19 situation, **the 2020 program HAS BEEN POSTPONED.** Below is a tentative schedule that had been planned:

Day Zero:

PM check-in. Attendees arrive at campground and cabins.

Day One:

AM: Chinese Laundry Building. Since we visited last year, this historic structure, which has been used as an anonymous storage building for years, has been restored and repurposed as an interpretive facility, with exhibits that describe its original use, thanks to the efforts of Sabrina Diaz, Chief of Interpretation. Early Chinese workers in Yosemite National Park provided many essential services for the tourist trade, from cooking for the hotel dining rooms, to growing fresh produce for the kitchens, to washing the large volume of hotel and restaurant linens.

AM-PM: Wawona area walks. Explore the area around the Pioneer History Village and the Wawona Hotel. Take walks to see the Chinese gardens location, nearby trails and natural features, including waterfalls. Drive or hike to the Mariposa Grove shuttle station for a ride to see and hike among a stand of over 500 giant sequoias. *Optional:* A hike along the partially restored old road built by Chinese to Mariposa Grove.

PM: Group potluck dinner, Wawona Community Center. The group potluck has been moved to Friday, so that all can get acquainted early, and leave more time for fun hikes the next two days.

Day Two:

Tioga Road explorations AM and PM. Itinerary not yet finalized. Two hour drive, Hwy 41 from Wawona to Yosemite Valley, then up to Highway 120 (Tioga Pass Road) for hikes led by Ranger Yen-Yen Chan. Potential destinations to see and hike to include: Tuolumne Meadows; Lembert Dome; May Lake; portions of the 56-mile Great Sierra Wagon Road, a mining road built in 130 days 1882-1883 by a work crew that included 250 Chinese; and remnants of the Bennettville mining town.

Day Three:

AM: Buffalo Soldiers talk. Ranger Shelton Johnson will give a talk about the African American cavalry units of the U.S. Army that patrolled and managed Yosemite and Sequoia National Parks at the beginning of the 20th

century.

PM: Additional hikes to be determined. Focus will be on waterfalls and natural landscapes.

Date to be determined:

Annual Backpacking trip to Sing Peak: For experienced backpackers only. Contact Jack Shu: jkshu52@gmail.com, (619) 708-2050, or Yen-Yen Chan: Yen-Yen.Chan@nps.gov (limited number of spaces available, liability waivers required)

Accommodations: Due to our trip postponement, we will make new cabin reservations when we know the new dates.

The future: Because we all are adventurers and history seekers, we're optimistic that we will be able to resume our Yosemite-Sing Peak Pilgrimages. We had been also planning side trips to and from Yosemite, including to Hanford and Armona Chinatowns, and to other historic Chinese settlements. To be placed on our Yosemite and field trip interest list, please leave your name and contact information with our office staff at info@chssc.org.



March Meeting, continued from cover: racist nowadays, but the name of the machine could be interpreted as an attribution to the hard work of the Chinese butcher. The "Iron Chink" gained a foothold in canneries after 1909, which Chinese workers would simply push the fish in this machine, of which one would replace 25 Chinese workers.

With the long hours, low wages, and unpleasant work, not too many people wanted to take such a laborious job, but the Chinese willingly did. Their position as the main labor force in canneries started to dwindle. The Chiao brothers charted the different sources of workers over the years, tracking the Chinese, Japanese, Filipino, and Mexican labor, and tracked how Chinese labor at the canneries declined over the 1900's. The decline of Chinese workers was due to several reasons. Chinese labor was being replaced with new immigrants, such as the Filipinos that were sent to canneries by labor unions. After WWII, the salmon resources were reduced, and consumer taste changed as people moved from canned to frozen or fresh, so the canning industry decreased in size. The Chiao brothers said that the last trace of Chinese Americans in the industry was in 1952 when 20 were employed in Alaska.

The Chiao brothers gave a very informative talk about the industry of canning fish, with interesting photos and diagrams, and presented many historical facts that they obtained while researching the topic. They hope to compile their research in a book.



Condolences to

*the family of Howard Y. Chan, long-time
CHSSC member and WWII veteran, who
passed away on February 10, 2020;*

*the family Frieda Ching Wong, long-time
member of CHSSC, who passed away on
February 17, 2020;*

*and to CHSSC Vice President Linda Bentz on
the passing of her brother, Greg Wallace, who
passed away on March 10, 2020.*



Chinese Historical Society of Southern California

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Community Calendar

In order to follow COVID-19 safety precautions outlined by the CDC, **the CHSSC will be cancelling several events:**

April 1, 2020

April Monthly Meeting -- CANCELLED

We will notify you before the May Monthly Meeting if our regular schedule will resume.

April 4, 2020

Ching Ming Ceremony at Evergreen Cemetery -- CANCELLED

April 25, 2020

2020 Annual Golden Spike Awards Dinner -- POSTPONED

When the dinner is rescheduled, we will be sure to let membership know the new date.

Other events on our calendar:

Monday, April 30-May 8, 2020

Los Angeles Asian Pacific Film Festival/No. 36

From their website: "We are moving forward with our Festival as planned, and should the situation change, we will update you right way." For more details and up-to-date information, visit their website at vcmedia.org.

Saturday, June 20-August 2, 2020

Lauren Yee's King of the Yees -- CANCELLED

The play is about Lauren Yee and her relationship with her father, but also about maintaining her Chinese Culture and the vitality of San Francisco's Chinatown. Performances run Friday and Saturday evenings at 8:00PM, and Saturday and Sunday afternoons at 2:30PM. Tickets available on their website

Currently, the Sierra Madre Playhouse is continuing performances. For updates and tickets, visit their website at sierramadreplayhouse.org.

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