



Bulletin 簡報

CHINESE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF AMERICA MUSEUM Winter 2014 | Vol. 50, No. 4

Voices from the Railroad: stories by descendants of Chinese railroad workers

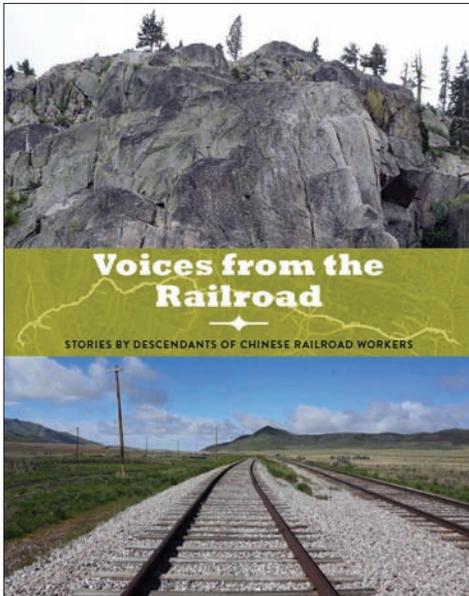


Photo by Corky Lee

Left: *Voices from the Railroad* is available for purchase in our museum store and online at chsa.org. Right: CHSA Executive Director Sue Lee and railroad worker descendant families at CHSA's gala on September 20, 2014.

No one could have predicted that 2014 would see renewed efforts to recover the stories of Chinese railroad workers. The convergence of several efforts—Stanford University's Chinese Railroad Workers of North America Project, the Department of Labor's Hall of Honor Induction of Chinese Railroad Workers, and the efforts of Asian Americans at Promontory Summit to rectify the absence of Chinese in the official "Last Spike" photograph—brought new attention to the 145 year old story of Chinese laborers working on the Central Pacific Railroad.

CHSA's project "Work of Giants" has aspirations of becoming a game changer—to take our place in the American historical narrative—in our own words, in

our own voices using collected stories and documentation on railroad workers.

This effort hopes to shatter misconceptions about the thousands of Chinese who helped build not just the First Transcontinental Railroad, but the American West. They were not just nameless, uneducated laborers.

Voices from the Railroad is a booklet of three families drawn from the oral history interviews conducted through the Stanford project. For too many years, the public has heard virtually nothing about the lives of actual railroad workers. While documentation and "proof" is rare, descendant families have passed on their understanding of their American experience through their own family lore.

Accounts of three railroad workers—Jim King (Jow Kee), Hung Wai Loh, Lim Lip Hong by their descendants Gene O. Chan, Russell N. Low and Andrea Yee only hint at the rich legacy of their families experience.

Jim King worked on the Central Pacific Railroad and thus far, is one of the few laborers who is named on a document. Jim King Co. is listed on a Central Pacific Railroad Payroll Record. He settled in Courtland, CA and raised a family.

The account of Hung Lai Woh describes a specific task of building the Central Pacific Railroad, and even talks about how his brother lost the use of his eye in one of the many blasting accidents that occurred while building the snow sheds in the Sierras.

Then finally, a San Francisco original: arriving at age 12, Lim Lip Hong's journey mirrors the history of Chinese in California, working where he could throughout California and the West. Eventually settling in Potrero Hill, he worked in the Dogpatch. You can find his sons in photos of old Chinatown by Arnold Genthe.

This is what CHSA is about—recovering our stories and telling them in our own words and own voices, making them accessible to our community and beyond.

We thank every descendant who has brought our pioneer past to life. And we hope to bring more stories to you as we work toward a 2019 150th anniversary of the Transcontinental Railroad.

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Upcoming museum events:

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 8, ALL DAY

Celebrate CHSA's 51st Anniversary

Join us for a day of performances and talks exploring the rich history and heritage of the Chinese in America. Featuring: a dragon dance followed by a talk by Corey Chan of Kei Lun Martial Arts; **The Wonderful World of Watercolor with Jake Lee** art exhibit and video screening in the Choy Gallery; a salute to our nation's veterans with a screening of *Uncommon Courage: Breakout at Chosin*, the story of Major Kurt Chew-Een Lee. You are also invited to reflect on the 45th anniversary of the publication of *A History of the Chinese in California: A Syllabus*, edited by CHSA founder Thomas Chinn, Him Mark Lai and Philip P. Choy.



Dragon dance at the CHSA Museum

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 13, ALL DAY

Annual Holiday Party & Donor Appreciation

Get into the spirit of giving with our annual holiday party. You can bring a new toy to donate for the SF Firefighter's Toy Drive. A special reception will be held for our donors as we unveil new additions to our Donor Legacy wall. At our arts and crafts table, you can make dioramas inspired by Frank Wong's Chinatown miniatures. Fun for the whole family!



FRIDAY, DECEMBER 19, 5PM

Winter Solstice Reception with Leland Wong

Start the winter off right with Leland Wong and CHSA Museum. Details forthcoming. Dumplings may be involved.

Angels Project rescues CHSA's collections

A big "thank you" to the the Western Association of Art Conservation (WAAC) Angels Project and The Foundation of the American Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works Angels Grant. The Angels Project provided a dozen professional conservators to perform pro bono work at CHSA on September 8th. With the Angels Project coordinators, we identified over 200 objects in CHSA's collection that were in need of conservation care. Several high-priority archival works that were at risk due to fragile and unstable conditions were selected. Photographs, glass plate negatives, lantern slides, scrapbooks and framed artwork were among those chosen for rehousing and treatment. Objects that were once at risk are now properly housed in archival boxes.



Collections consultant Paloma Añoveros supervises Angels Project conservators providing treatment on collections at CHSA.

Leland Wong's Chinatown Studio: Two-year run at CHSA Museum coming to a close



The end of 2014 will mark the conclusion of a nearly two year-long residency for artist and photographer Leland Wong at the CHSA Museum. Over the span of two exhibitions co-produced with Gordon Chun Design, this unprecedented collaboration between a visual artist and CHSA has produced the following: original artwork and photography highlighting daily life in San Francisco Chinatown; new connections with the Asian American community and the Chinese diaspora; and dumplings, lots of dumplings.

For CHSA's 2013 exhibition "Creative Spaces," Leland Wong was invited to set up the first-ever artist studio at CHSA and create new works in the CHSA Museum's Yick Gallery. Wong premiered the large-scale mural *Kois at Dragon's Gate* painted directly on the glass windows of the Yick Gallery, another first for CHSA. Throughout the year, Wong set up a photography studio for the community, taught youth screenprinting workshops for API Legal Outreach, and shared his art with visitors. CHSA hosted two Summerblasts and one Winterblast, the semi-annual reunions for "We Grew Up in San Francisco Chinatown" (WGUIFCT), a community Facebook group founded by Leland Wong. Wong's famous dumplings were as much a highlight as the music at these gatherings, as the community-crowned "Dumpling King" shared his cooking with



Clockwise, top left to bottom: Leland Wong's *Kois at Dragon's Gate*, 2013. Wong serves dumplings in the Yick Gallery during the opening reception for #Chinatown. WGUIFCT with special guests at Summerblast 2014.

visitors and friends.

In 2014, Wong's residency at CHSA was relaunched as "Leland Wong's Chinatown Studio," featuring a video by Chris Fujimoto that provided an inside look at Wong's daily life. CHSA commissioned Wong to create new large-scale works. The exhibit #Chinatown: Leland Wong's Photographic Sketches, completed in August, includes 40 panels of Wong's photography of San Francisco Chinatown and beyond.

2014 also marked the 145th anniversary of the completion of the First Transcontinental Railroad. As a Spotlight Photographer for the Smithsonian APA Center's *A Day in the Life of Asian Pacific America* exhibition, Wong traveled with fellow photographer Corky Lee and descendants of Chinese railroad workers to Promontory Summit in

Utah. There, they recreated Andrew Russell's photograph of the 1869 Golden Spike ceremony, with present-day Asian Americans standing in for the Chinese workers who were absent in the original. Wong, a railroad worker descendant himself, is currently working on a mural featuring the Chinese at Promontory Point.

Although Leland Wong's studio presence in the gallery will soon draw to a close, future collaborations between Wong and CHSA are still planned. At least one more exhibit with CHSA is in the works, based on #Chinatown, that will focus on Wong's early photography.

JOIN US TO SAY THANKS: Winter Solstice Reception with Leland Wong
FRIDAY, DECEMBER 19, 2014, 5PM @ CHSA



The *CHSA Bulletin* is published multiple times throughout the year. To contribute articles about Chinese American community and historical news and events, please submit articles to info@chsa.org.

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CHINESE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF AMERICA MUSEUM



Ways to share your generosity with CHSA

Planned Giving

As a non-profit organization, CHSA thrives on your generosity to pursue our mission to promote the legacy and contributions of the Chinese in America. **Planned giving can provide us with a future gift through your financial or estate plans in these ways:**

- **Outright gifts**
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Explore all of your options with us by calling (415) 391-1188 or emailing info@chsa.org.



Donations & Employer Match

Donations of any amount to CHSA are always welcome! Donations can be made by mail, on our website at chsa.org/support, or by calling (415) 391-1188.

Also, please **consider asking your employer if they can match your donation.** American Express, PG&E, and Google are just some of the companies who have recently contributed to CHSA through their employer-matching gift programs. Ask your employer, or contact us to find out how to participate.

Donor Legacy Wall

There is still time to be recognized this year on CHSA's Donor Legacy Wall. Contributions made by **December 1, 2014** will be recognized at this year's Donor Appreciation event with a digital display (for gifts of \$1000 or more) and a window tile (for gifts of \$5000 or more). Contact us or visit chsa.org/support/legacy-wall-campaign for more information.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON DONATIONS AND MEMBERSHIPS: call (415) 391-1188, email info@chsa.org or visit chsa.org/support. All contributions are tax deductible (Federal tax ID #94-67122446). Thank you for your continued support!