

源 the beginning

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The Chinese Historical Society of New England (CHSNE) was conceived five years ago over clam rolls and corn chowder in the historic Union Oyster House near the Quincy Market in Boston. The idea first came from David S. Y. Wong, the proprietor of Sun Sun Market - then the second oldest produce store in Chinatown. It took hold with a sense of urgency shared by the five founding members - and many others as we soon discovered. In the summer of 1992, the nonprofit CHSNE was formally incorporated as the first organization dedicated *solely* to documenting, preserving, and promoting the history and legacy of Chinese immigration in New England.

The CHSNE is based in Boston - home to the only Chinatown in New England since late 1800s. Our mission is to reclaim a place for Chinese Americans in the official history of cities and towns across the region. We also see our mission as one that will further promote cross-cultural understanding and mutual respect in a society increasingly marked by its diversity - or fragmentation, as some would argue. Our programs and projects will seek to provide forums and opportunities where memories and experiences related to the various facets of Chinese immigration and legacy can be shared, and compared, by those within the Chinese American community as well as by our non-Chinese neighbors along the Boston Harbor, down Washington Street and beyond.

We are governed by a board of twenty-one directors representing a wide range of experience, perspective, and expertise. Many have also long dedicated to advancing community growth and development. We will continue to reach out to different groups in our community, regardless of their ancestral place of origin, political persuasion, socio-economical class or other differences. Active community collaboration and membership participation underpin our program development, exhibition design, and collection-building. It is important to us that the history of a multi-dimensional community such as ours not be left to the interpretation and safekeeping by only a selected few. We have many unique stories to tell and markers to place.

We will revisit places like North Adams where 235 Chinese workers were brought in from California in June of 1870 as strikebreakers by the local shoe manufacturer, Calvin T. Sampson. Five years later, many of them moved on to Boston and pitched their tents along what is now known as Ping-On Alley (peace and security), thus putting down the roots of a permanent Chinese community in the city. We will

try to retrace the footsteps of those 30 Chinese youngsters who, in 1872, were sent by the Ching government's Chinese Educational Mission to Hartford, Connecticut, to begin their training in western science and technology. We will make our way to Salem, Massachusetts, where the legacy of China Trade was borne, and through the Arboretum, home to the offsprings of those ancient seeds from China

However, to sustain broad-based support after the initial excitement or curiosity about the Society has worn off, we must be able to make history *relevant* and *immediate* to as many of our constituents as possible. With this in mind, we have been focusing on four projects: the restoration of the Mt. Hope Chinese Burial Grounds, the reunion of Hudson Street residents, the documentation for Chinatown Heritage Trail, and the Tyler Street Story exhibition. Being a new organization, we place a high priority on establishing organizational credibility. Accordingly, our projects and programs emphasize a step-by-step approach in order to produce modest yet tangible results through an incremental process of growth.



For us, the question has never been simply "Whose history is it?" but "How can we write our history together?"

Being a historical society, we are interested in building a repository for a variety of historical materials, ranging from official documents to personal memorabilia, from artifacts to audio/video recordings. Our collections will be partly driven by our need to inform and engage our constituents in collaborative exploration and continuous exchange. But it is just as important, if not more so, that the CHSNE develop the capacity to function as an accessible information and education center which draws on both internal and external resources. Aside from on-going efforts to collect oral histories and salvage artifacts facing immediate danger of destruction or dispersment, we will also support the development of information access aids, produce exhibitions focusing on specific issues or target groups, and promote creative ways to achieve historic conservation that will respect both the physical environment and the host community.



CHSNE
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