

The CHSNE Sojourner Award reflects the pioneer spirit of those early transient immigrants, and recognizes trailblazers in our community who have helped to build the legacy on which we can now stand, build and thrive. Paul W. Lee's family history in America, which begins with his great-grandfather, and follows generations of community trailblazers, has had lasting impact on him and influenced his own path and community efforts. CHSNE could not be more proud to honor Paul W. Lee as one of 2020's Sojourner Awardees.

Deep History

Paul Lee's great-grandfather was a stowaway who landed in San Francisco close to the turn of the century. There he found work servicing the railroad industry. Like many, he used the opportunity of destroyed immigration records after the San Francisco earthquake to establish legal status. In doing so, he was able to bring over his son, Paul's grandfather, Lee Hen You, before returning to China. Lee Hen You migrated to Boston, where he started a hand laundry. In 1940, he was able to bring Paul's father, Richard, to Boston to join him.

Richard Lee served in World War II and, through the War Brides Act of 1945, he was able to return to China and marry and bring Chou Bik Kuen Lee to Boston. She was the first woman in the family line to immigrate to the United States. The family, eventually consisting of Paul, his older brother Thomas and younger sister Elizabeth, lived in Chinatown until the early 1960s. Richard worked as a waiter, and was eventually the maître d' at a Chinese restaurant, while Chou worked as a seamstress in the local garment factories. Paul recalls the eventual breakup of his old neighborhood from many factors, including urban renewal and the construction of the Massachusetts Turnpike and the Expressway, and expansion of Tufts Medical Center. Many families relocated to the South End, and others to Allston-Brighton. When Paul was 11, Richard and Chou moved the family to Brookline, where they had heard good things about the school system, and all three children graduated from the Brookline public schools.

Turning to Law

Paul arrived at Columbia University as a freshman in the middle of the Vietnam War protests. Motivated largely by the racial characterizations of the war as one of midwestern farm boys fighting diminutive Asians, he gravitated toward the protests. As the US combatants became increasingly pulled not from the farms of Iowa but the ghettos of urban cities, Paul was part of the Third World Coalition that helped to shut down the University. It is this awakening that he credits with inspiring him to go to law school after graduating with a B.S. in 1972. He entered Cornell Law School with an eye toward criminal law, or as he put it, "I thought I was going to be a criminal lawyer, and reform the criminal justice system." However, he fell in with what he called the 'law journal crowd' and moved to Donovan, Leisure, Newton, and Irvine, a white-shoe firm in New York City. He initially planned only a short stay, but as he thrived in corporate law, he practice there for 5 years.

It was at this time that Paul met his wife, Mary, who was a medical student at Tufts. Mary was also from Boston, and when she refused to live in New York, Paul returned to Boston

in 1980 and joined the firm of Goodwin Procter, which had rejected him in 1975, a year before his law school graduation. For many years, that rejection letter has been on his office wall at Goodwin Procter next to the announcement that he had been made a partner by the very same firm.

Building Platforms for Asian American Attorneys

One of Paul's mentors at Goodwin Procter was Richard Soden who, in 1979, became one of the first African-American partners at a major law firm in Boston. Richard had been a founder of the Massachusetts Black Lawyers Association and served as its fifth president. It was Richard who encouraged Paul and their Goodwin Procter colleague Marian Tse to form the Asian American Lawyers Association of Massachusetts (AALAM), along with a handful of Asian American friends and attorneys practicing in downtown Boston. A half dozen attorneys, including Paul and Marian, Francis Chin, Harry Yee, Diane Young-Spitzer, and former Sojourner Awardee Caroline Chang, put together a list of all Asian lawyers they had crossed paths with in Boston: a list of about thirty. They scoured a directory of Boston attorneys and sent invitations to anybody with an Asian-sounding last name, which netted replies of regret and good wishes from many Caucasian Lees as well. Paul served as AALAM's first president, from 1984 to 1986, and was active in growing AALAM through networking and support of successive classes of Asian American attorneys. He reflects that when AALAM was founded, with rare exceptions, each founder was the only Asian attorney in his or her law firm or office. "We didn't know anybody else around town," he says, "so we all thought we were going it alone until we got together and realized that we're not alone. We're all feeling the same insecurities, alienation and challenges, so we should get together and compare notes and be mutually supportive."

The founding of AALAM predates the founding of the National Asian Pacific American Bar Association (NAPABA) by half a decade. In the early 90s, NAPABA leadership drafted Paul onto its board as an officer, regional governor, and eventually, its 7th president. Where AALAM was about turning inward for mutual support and community strength, NAPABA was an opportunity to expand the network outward.

Growing and Sticking Together

As NAPABA grew, Paul recognized that its value was in the networks that it fostered. He fondly remembers inviting local attorneys for a meal or coffee in any US city when he was in town, which became a roadshow for encouraging bonds across and between cities. About community-building and networking, Marian remembers Paul was "always encouraging us to just get out and do it." In NAPABA, Paul saw an opportunity to get back to the community-building he started at Columbia. Through his experiences leading the organization, he became involved with the Asian American Justice Center in DC and became its board chair when it was coming together with the Asian Law Caucus in San Francisco and the Asian Pacific American Legal Center in Los Angeles. These groups (along with two others) are now under the joint banner of Asian Americans Advancing Justice, an organization with a long-term aspiration of becoming the Asian American equivalent to the NAACP Legal Defense Fund. He also drew the

attention of the American Bar Association (ABA), and served on its Commission on Racial and Ethnic Diversity. He was awarded the ABA's Spirit of Excellence Award in 2007 and has maintained his robust involvement with the ABA, most recently serving on the Commission on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity, and before that on the Commission on Woman in the Profession and on its board of governors.

Of course, Paul's roots in Boston and Chinatown have never been far from his mind. Paul is a founder of the Asian Community Development Corporation (ACDC), and used his corporate law contacts to help raise support for ACDC projects. One Greenway, a notable ACDC initiative, now stands on land reclaimed from the Massachusetts Turnpike Authority, which had displaced much of Paul's old neighborhood community from Chinatown so many years before. Paul has also served on the Governor's Asian American Commission and is currently a Trustee of the Conservation Law Foundation, which ensures environmental stewardship of New England, and of WGBH. Paul is also on the board of The Boston Foundation (TBF), where he is fundraising for and launching their Asian Community Fund. Currently at over \$1.5 Million, the Asian Community Fund will be permanently endowed for the benefit and support of, and will be controlled by, Boston's Asian community. In utilizing the resources of AALAM and Goodwin Procter and directing them to the Chinatown community through ACDC and TBF, Paul's professional and civic accomplishments are a model for many younger attorneys. Marian describes Paul as "the one person who cares so much about giving back to the community." She continues, noting that Paul is "more than just a good colleague and a partner; he is a model of someone who gives back."

Charging the Next Generation.

Of course, as Paul's continued work in retirement shows, the work is never done. Paul wistfully remembers NAPABA's early days in comparison to how large and, in some ways, unwieldy, it has now become. He cautions those who encounter NAPABA as a fully-formed organization with a large staff and accumulated resources not to take the organization and its longevity for granted. "It really is up to each of us and the commitment we have to each other to keep this thing together, because it is a very diverse group of people." Recent national conventions of 2,000 or more are a far cry from the pot luck conventions on law school campuses that Paul remembers from the early days. Reflecting on that growth, he sees a large and active membership with different priorities, including sub-groups like the National Filipino American Lawyers Association and the National Conference of Vietnamese American Attorneys, or the very active Solo/Small Firm Network. He hopes that these smaller constituencies "recognize the value of our unifying as a group, because individually, these organizations are not going to be as strong as we are together."

Paul also cannot hide his disappointment that as that first wave of Asian partners in Boston has retired, the gains that he and his colleagues made to elevate each other in the profession have not been matched or maintained. He is hopeful that companies are now pushing hard to combat implicit bias, workplace microaggressions or systemic racism at law firms and companies, but he wonders, with frankness, "where were [they] for the last twenty

years?” From his spot as AALAM’s founding president, he admits that it can be painful for him to see that its members have become caretakers instead of innovators. He charges the next generation: “if you want to be a leader, you have to lead by setting the tone. And if the tone is: ‘We’re all here for each other. We’re here to help each other. How can we help you or what are your needs?’” only then you can start providing those answers and building cohesion and building togetherness.” After all, Paul continues, “There is so much that we could be doing to help each other, and it all comes down to making contact, talking to each other, learning what our needs are and what our resources are.”

Unlike his great-grandfather and the other early sojourners, Paul did not arrive in Boston from anywhere else, and he certainly has no plans to leave. But like the sojourners, he has built both public platforms and literal buildings to raise others up. He established foundations, educational scholarships, and now a permanent fund for community investment. CHSNE is gratefully inspired by, and is proud to celebrate, Paul’s accomplishments.