



History Alive! “Uncle Toisan” Premieres to Grand Reception



*Charlie Chin as “Uncle Toisan” on the streets of San Francisco Chinatown.
Photo by Dr. Don Cheu.*

The Chinese Historical Society of America proudly presents the premiere of an original *History Alive!* performance of “Uncle Toisan” by Artist-in-Residence **Charlie Chin** this spring.

This *Chautauqua*-style storytelling presentation features a Chinese American immigrant’s unique life in the United States. Highlighting the Chinese Exclusion Act, Angel Island, World War II, and the civil rights movement, “Uncle Toisan” is a powerful, affecting, and educational experience for all audiences.

Uncle Toisan enters the country as a 17-year-old “paper son” (immigrants who purchased legal immigration status as a “paper son” of an American citizen), then perseveres through a two-month detention at the U.S. Immigration Station at Angel Island on the eve of its closing in 1939. Often called the Guardian of the Western Gate, the U.S. Immigra-

tion Station at Angel Island existed from 1910 to 1940 as a detention center for immigrants—largely Chinese, but also Japanese, Russian, and many others.

Uncle Toisan is then drafted in 1942 to serve in Europe during World War II, returning from the battlefield to face discrimination at

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

Upcoming “Uncle Toisan” Events

Saturday, May 16, 12:15-12:45 pm, Asian Heritage Street Celebration, 200 Larkin St, (in front of the Asian Art Museum), San Francisco

Sunday, June 7, 3-4 pm, Oakland Museum of California, 1000 Oak St (@10th St, one block from Lake Merritt BART), Oakland*

Saturday, June 13, 2:30-3:30 pm, San Francisco Public Library, Chinatown Branch, 1135 Powell St

Sunday, June 14, 2-3 pm, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Library, 150 E. San Fernando St, San Jose

Tuesday, June 23, 6:15-7:15 pm, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Library, 150 E. San Fernando St, San Jose

* All programs are FREE to the public with the exception of June 7th, when “Uncle Toisan” is presented as part of OMCA’s Family Explorations! The performance is free with OMCA museum admission.

History Alive! “Uncle Toisan”

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

CHINESE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF AMERICA

BOARD OFFICERS

Paul Fong, *President*
Connie Young Yu, *1st Vice President*
Doug Chan, Esq., *2nd Vice President*
Linda Cheu, *Treasurer*
Virginia C. Gee, *Secretary*

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Donald Chan
Cedric Cheng
Mike Cheng
Linda A. Cheu
Willard Chin
Barre Fong
Calvin Fong
Robert Fung
Russell Leong
Alexander Lock
Galín Luk
Dr. Rodney Lum
Alisa Yee
Jeffery P. Woo, Esq., *Legal Counsel*

BOARD EMERITI

Him Mark Lai
Philip P. Choy

OFFICERS

Thomas W. Chinn
C.H. Kwok
Chingwah Lee
H.K. Wong
Thomas W.S. Wu, D.D.S.

STAFF

Sue Lee, *Executive Director*
Judy Hu, *Communications Director*
Lenora Lee, *Operations Manager*
Michelle Louie, *Administrative Assistant*
Pam Wong, *Programs Coordinator*
Charlie Chin, *Artist-in-Residence*



Photo by Dr. Don Cheu.

The premise of the story is Uncle Toisan playing the Chinese two-stringed fiddle called the erhu on the street in Chinatown to make a few extra dollars to supplement his retirement...

home as a laborer in the restaurants and laundries of San Francisco Chinatown. He witnesses and experiences the tremendous changes in Chinatown stemming from the passage of the Civil Rights Act, the final lifting of Exclusion, the growth of Asian American political empowerment, and the changing demographics of California due to post Vietnam War rounds of immigration.

The premise of the story is Uncle Toisan playing the Chinese two-stringed fiddle called the *erhu* on the street in Chinatown to make a few extra dollars to supplement his retirement in a small apartment he shares with his nephew's family who recently immigrated from the People's Republic of China. It is the early 1990's and Uncle Toisan is in his late 70's. A group of students from a UC Berkeley Asian American Studies class on a walking tour led by CHSA guides stops to talk to him, inspiring him to share his story.

Performances are approximately one-hour long and include a dramatic monologue and Q&A session, followed by a presentation where the performer steps out of character

to speak with the audience.

Following the premiere performance of “Uncle Toisan” on April 18, 2009 (which was attended by an audience of 250), more than 50 educational and public events will take place featuring Charlie Chin's newest *History Alive!* character.

School programs will take place in institutions as varied as the Chinese American International School, International Studies Academy, San Francisco State University Ethnic Studies program, Guadalupe Elementary School, John Muir Middle School, and Aragon High School.

Free public programs were also held early May at the Main Branch of the San Francisco Public Library as well as at the Asian Pacific American Heritage Celebration in San Mateo—with many more upcoming!

“Uncle Toisan” is generously supported by a grant from the **James Irvine Foundation, California Council for the Humanities** as part of the Council's state-wide *California Stories* Initiative, **Zellerbach Family Foundation**, and **Wallace Alexander Gerbode Foundation.** ☞

A Chinatown Perspective on Architecture & History

Walk San Francisco's Chinatown with Philip Choy, and the trinket shops of Grant Avenue recede from view. He steers your eyes upward, to the aged masonry structures and theatrical canopies and pagodas that adorn them. He explains how they're more than a design motif: They're cultural markers as complex as history itself.

JOHN KING, ARCHITECTURE CRITIC, SAN FRANCISCO CHRONICLE, FEBRUARY 6, 2009

Historian, author, and CHSA Board Emeritus **Philip P. Choy** spoke to more than 200 people at two book readings around the Lunar New Year: on February 5 at the San Francisco Public Library Main Branch and again on February 21 at the CHSA Learning Center.



Phil Choy (left) leads SF Chronicle writer John King through Chinatown on a walking tour. Courtesy of Judy Hu.

Phil's latest publication is the new edition of his seminal study, *The Architecture of San Francisco Chinatown*, about the enduring role of Chinatown in the San Francisco Bay Area's social and cultural landscape.

"The four square blocks of San Francisco Chinatown have been pivotal in telling the history of Chinese Americans," Phil stated. "The Chinese were categorized as second class citizens for many years around the Exclusion Act. We were not allowed to buy or live in properties outside those four square blocks of Chinatown. Yet, in a strange twist, after a hundred years of humiliation, Chinese are now seen as good, well-behaved citizens, and Chinatown is hailed as an exciting tourist destination."

Born and raised in San Francisco's Chinatown, Phil Choy is a renowned authority on California and Chinese American history and also the author of the recent *Canton Footprints: Sacramento's Chinese Legacy*. A retired architect, Phil has served on the San Francisco Museum and Historical Society Advisory Committee and the California State Historical Resources Commission. ☞

Fortune Cookie Chronicles Book Reading

New York Times reporter and author **Jennifer 8. Lee** presented an engaging visual program and book talk about *The Fortune Cookie Chronicles: Adventures in the World of Chinese Food* to a full crowd on Sunday, March 22, at the CHSA Learning Center.

Jennifer spoke about how her quest took her to the hometown of General Tso (a military hero immortalized as much for crunchy chicken as his conquests), the surprising origins of the fortune cookie (it's not China!), and to six continents in search of the world's greatest Chinese restaurant.

Funny, entertaining, and educational, Jennifer highlights a food that is both foreign and familiar. Chapters throughout the book are



CHSA staff Judy Hu (holding the book) poses with author Jennifer 8. Lee. Courtesy of Judy Hu.

dedicated to topics as varied as the history of the fortune cookie (Chapter 3: "A Cookie Wrapped in a Mystery Inside an Enigma"), why Jewish people love Chinese food (Chapter

7: "Why Chow Mein Is the Chosen Food of the Chosen People—or, The Kosher Duck Scandal of 1989"), the perils of Chinese food delivery (Chapter 11: "The Mystery of the Missing Chinese Deliveryman"), and how fortune cookie writers come up with the terse sayings (Chapter 18: "So What Did Confucius Really Say?").

Understanding Chinese food—and the people who make it—is a remarkable journey Jennifer showcases with hilarious anecdotes and an informative slide show presentation. The book also sparks debates as to who really invented chop suey and whether or not sweet and sour pork is healthy—and is an insightful tribute to immigrants and to America. ☞

Grand Re-Opening of the U.S. Immigration Station at Angel Island

The U.S. Immigration Station at Angel Island's grand re-opening to the public took place on Sunday, February 15, with more than 1,600 attendees.

Despite the heavy rain and wind, capacity crowds visited the National Historic Landmark. Several dignitaries were on hand to mark the occasion, including **Ruth Coleman**, director of the California State Parks; **Cynthia Garrett**, superintendent of National Park Service's Ellis Island Immigration Station, who announced a new "sister park" status between the two key immigration sites; and **Kathy Lim Ko**, president of the Angel Island Immigration Station Foundation. In addition, the Consul General of the People's Republic of China, **Gao Zhangshen**, stationed in San Francisco, was present to honor the memory of the thousands who came from China.

Declared a National Historic Landmark in 1997, the U.S. Immigration Station at Angel Island was the entry point for over one million immigrants, many of whom came from Asia, between 1910 and 1940. Chinese immigrants were the largest group, and they endured lengthy stays due to rigorous interrogations by officials to authenticate legal entrants.

For the first time ever, after extensive repairs and restoration work, the public saw all rooms of the immigration station barracks. As visitors



(Photos above and below left) Banners and suitcase items reflect the different countries that immigrants arrived from.

(Photo below right) The inner barracks of the U.S. Immigration Station at Angel Island, as recreated for the re-opening celebration on February 15.

Photos by Surrey Blackburn.

toured the barracks, they encountered special presentations by CHSA Artist-in-Residence **Charlie Chin**, performance artist/dancer **Melody Takata**, historical re-enactor **Silvia Lange**, and designer

Daniel Quan, and heard a new soundscape designed by **Felicia Lowe**. Various cultural organizations were also present with informational booths, including CHSA with the *Remembering 1882* exhibit.

The newly created and dramatic living-history displays showed how immigrants lived in detention behind barred windows and doors for weeks and months. The bunks have been outfitted with clothing, artifacts, luggage, and personal items that reflect the nationalities of the tens of thousands of people who passed through the station. New lighting highlighted many of the nearly 300 Chinese poems and inscriptions in Japanese, Russian, Urdu, German, and Korean.

"The Immigration Station is a site of conscience, about immigration past, present, and future," said Kathy Lim Ko, President of the Angel Island Immigration Station Foundation. "It is a place for reflection on not only the very personal immigration experience, but on international relations and social justice. And it is a place of reconciliation for the wrongs that were done and the human rights that we must uphold."

For more information on visiting the U.S. Immigration Station at Angel Island, please visit <http://aiisf.org/>. ☯



A Celebration of the Year of the Ox: A Historical & Musical Legacy at Hakone Gardens in Saratoga

The Hakone Foundation co-sponsored, in association with the Chinese Historical Society of America, a celebration of the Lunar New Year at the beautiful Hakone Gardens in Saratoga, Calif. on the afternoon of Saturday, February 28.

Event highlights included historian **Connie Young Yu's** illustrated talk, "The Chinese-American Legacy of Hakone," which featured unique family photos and anecdotes; musician **Francis Wong & Ensemble**, and a sunset garden tour. Paramount to the celebration is the history of Hakone's century-long ties to San Jose's Chinatown (Heinlenville) and Japantown—and the partnership between the two communities.

Hakone Gardens is the oldest Asian and Japanese estate in the Western Hemisphere. Beginning in 1915, inspired by a lifelong interest in Japanese culture and their travels throughout Japan, San Francisco cultural leaders **Oliver and Isabel Stine** purchased 18 acres of Saratoga hillside to build a summer retreat for family and friends. Stimulated by displays at the 1915 Pan-Pacific Exhibition, Mrs. Stine traveled to Japan to gather ideas and when she returned home named her retreat after one of her favorite places in Japan, Fuji-Hakone National Park.

In 1961, **Joseph and Clara Gresham**, their son **Eldon** and wife **Deon**, and four Chinese American couples—**George and Marie Hall**, **John and Helen Kan**, **Dan and June Lee**, and **John and Mary Young** (the parents of Connie Young Yu)—purchased the estate. This partnership restored the neglected, overgrown gardens to their



(Top photo) Connie Young Yu (second from right) greets guests during the celebration.

(Middle photo) The beautiful landscape of Hakone Gardens, as seen by the entrance.

(Bottom photo) John and Mary Young at the Hakone Gardens, circa summer 1965.

All photos courtesy of Connie Young Yu.

original splendor—given their respect and reverence for the Japanese authenticity of the gardens—and enjoyed it as a private retreat.

The following excerpt, written

by Connie Young Yu based on her presentation, "The Hidden History of Hakone" at the Foothill Club, May 19, 2005 and sponsored by the Saratoga Historical Foundation, reflects on the Chinese partnership:

"My mother and her sister Marie, George Hall's wife, invited friends from Hong Kong and other places to visit Hakone, and they posed for pictures on the Shinto bridge in their Chinese dresses. My mother was a brush painter who brought fellow artists and teachers to Hakone. She and my dad respected the integrity of the Japanese gardens to the extent that they never added a single Chinese item—not a scroll or a vase—to the décor of the houses.

As a student at Mills College in Oakland, I enjoyed bringing my closest classmates to the gardens. When we entered the main gate, it was like another world. The place was so pristine, not a stone out of place, not a speck of debris on the path. We felt the need to speak in whispers. The majestic black pine my dad said was the most valuable tree of Hakone took our breath away."

In 1966, after five years of ownership, the Chinese American partners offered a beautifully maintained Hakone for sale to the City of Saratoga for all to enjoy.

The Hakone Foundation was formed in 1984 to preserve, enhance, and maintain Hakone for future generations. In 2000, the Hakone Foundation signed an exclusive 55-year lease with the City of Saratoga to carry out this mission. For more information, please visit www.hakone.com. ☪

Alien Registration Files Ceremony in Washington, D.C.

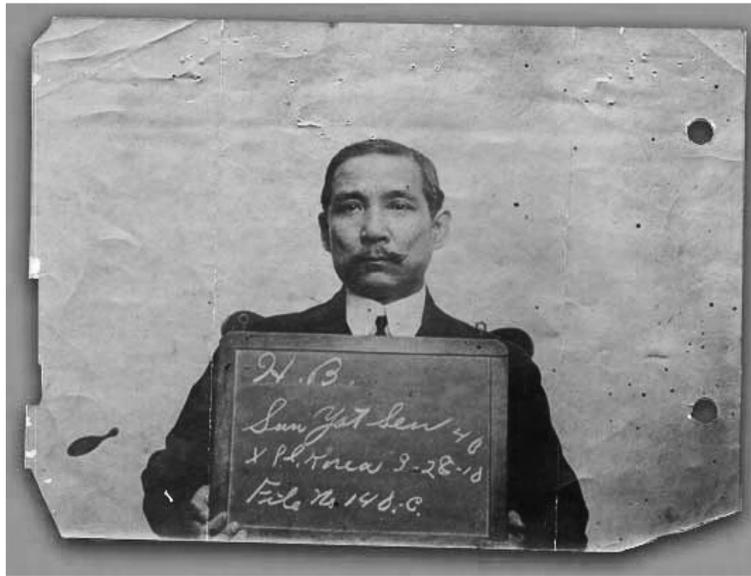
In a victorious milestone for Chinese American genealogical and historical research, an “A-Files” (or Alien Registration Files) schedule signing ceremony will take place on Wednesday, June 3, at the National Archives Building in Washington, D.C.

The event will be attended by the Acting United States Archivist **Adrienne Thomas** and the Director of the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service **Michael Aytes** to mark the permanent retention, preservation, and public access of the A-files by the **National Archives and Records Administration’s** (NARA) San Francisco Bay Area facility in San Bruno. As one of the major supporters of this cause, CHSA will be represented at this occasion by **Sue Lee**, Executive Director.

Under the Alien Registration Act of 1940, all foreigners in the United States were required to register with the Immigration and Naturalization Service, now known as the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service (USCIS). The A-files are records collected about these registered individuals, including photographs, birth certificates, visas, employment records, family-related documents, testimony, personal artifacts, and other biographical and historical information.

A-files are under the jurisdiction of USCIS, but following the schedule signing, case files for those born 100 years ago will be transferred to NARA. Subsequent eligible A-files will be transferred every five years from USCIS to NARA.

NARA is the federal agency



This case file of Dr. Sun Yat-Sen is an example of one of the most famous and fascinating discoveries in recent history at the National Archives. Photo source: National Archives and Records Administration, Pacific Region (San Francisco).

Under the Alien Registration Act of 1940, all foreigners in the United States were required to register with the Immigration and Naturalization Service, now known as the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service.

responsible for the preservation and public access of federal records of historical, legal, and fiscal value. Possessing records dating as far back as the late 1700’s, its vast holdings span the original signed copy of the U.S. Constitution to files from the Chinese Exclusion era of 1882-1943. These A-files also contain records of German, Italian, and Japanese World War II alien internees; Holocaust survivors; and immigrants from many different regions of Eastern Europe and the Pacific Islands.

The **Save Our National Archives Coalition** (SONA) has lob-

bied and organized letter-writing campaigns for more than ten years urging that the A-Files be transferred to NARA in San Bruno. The late Congressman **Tom Lantos** (D-San Mateo) was also essential in this effort for many years. In the fall of 2008, USCIS had determined that because of efficiency and money-saving “consolidation efforts,” NARA’s facility at Lee Summit in Missouri would be the best place to process the files.

The consequences of the removal of these primary source materials were uncertain and SONA was concerned that if the articles were damaged, destroyed, lost, or never returned during their removal and processing at another facility, public access to these items would be more difficult or even impossible.

Since late last year, USCIS and NARA have been meeting regularly to work out details regarding the scheduling of all A-Files for permanent retention in San Bruno. After SONA mounted another campaign, both USCIS and NARA assured them that the language for the accession agreement clearly states that the A-Files currently stored in the Pacific Region, San Bruno regional facility will remain there.

Thanks to SONA’s diligent and persistent efforts, in particular the dedication of Communication Co-chairs **Jennie F. Lew** and **Jeanie Chooley Low**, the A-Files will remain a valuable collection of American immigration history and reclaiming family stories.

“SONA has been instrumental in making sure our history remains

CONTINUED ON PAGE 7

Remembering 1882 Traveling Exhibit Nationwide Tour

The landmark traveling exhibit *Remembering 1882: Fighting for Civil Rights in the Shadow of the Chinese Exclusion Act* continues its nationwide tour after numerous stops along the eastern seaboard last year.

Beginning with the Organization of Chinese Americans National Convention in Washington, D.C. in July of 2008, *Remembering 1882* went on display at the Fifth Annual Asian Festival in Reston, Virginia in August before continuing on to Washington, D.C.'s Chinatown Community Culture Center into September. Other special exhibits also took place in the nation's capital in the fall at the Conference of National Asian Peace Officers Association, Georgetown Law School (sponsored by the immigration law and Asian-American Student Clubs), and



Photo courtesy of Pam Wong.

Howard University—culminating in a show at the University of Richmond in January, 2009.

Venturing southeast, *Remembering 1882* traveled to the University of Houston-Downtown O'Kane Gallery from February 11-26; Houston Chinese Community Center from March 6-12; and the rotunda of Houston City Hall during May 1-22; in between traveling to the *Brown v. Board of Education* National Historic

Site in Topeka, Kansas from April 1-30.

From then on, the exhibit ventured back to various government and judicial locations in Washington, D.C., including: Department of Justice, May 4-8; National Labor Relations Board, May 11-15; U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service, May 18-29; Government Accounting Office, June 1-5; Fairfax County Region-

al Library, June 15-19; and Fairfax County Government Center, June 22-26.

"The span and scope of the number of people who have been exposed to this exhibit is phenomenal," Sue Lee, CHSA Executive Director, said. "We are extremely proud to have this kind of reach into community groups and governmental offices to showcase the work of our organization." ❧

Alien Registration Files

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 6

accessible," Sue Lee said. "Our legacy will remain for future historians, researchers, and descendants to know our stories and past experiences. As important as it is for Asian and Pacific Island immigration records, the A-Files are inclusive of a diverse array of nationalities, and this victory is for everyone."

SONA is a broad consortium of nonprofit organizations and individuals dedicated to the preservation of public access and services provided by NARA. Participants include Angel Island Immigration Station Founda-

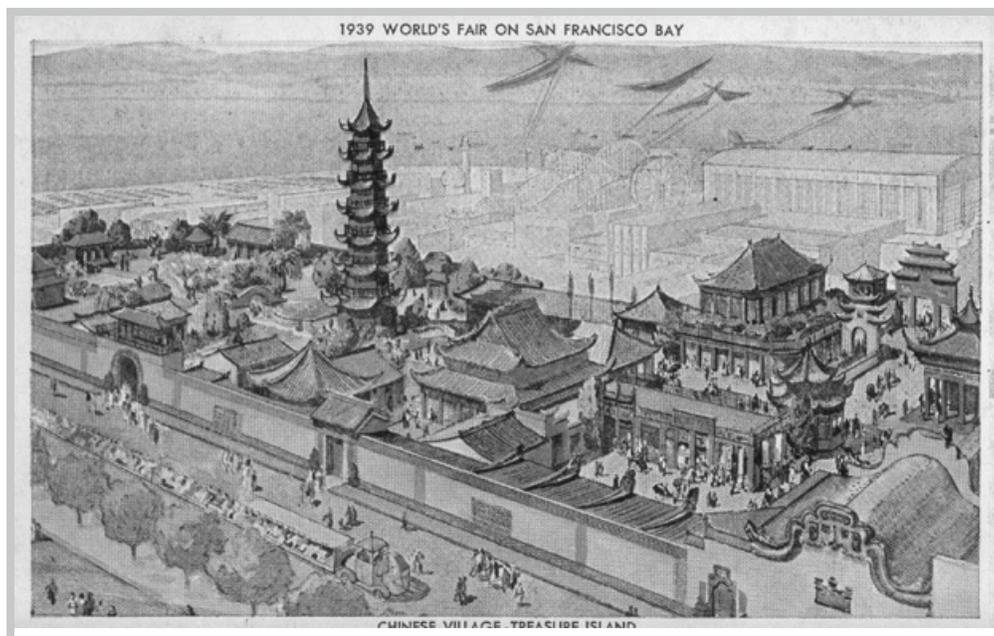
The Save Our National Archives Coalition (SONA) has lobbied and organized letter-writing campaigns for more than ten years urging that the A-Files be transferred to NARA in San Bruno.

tion, California State Genealogical Alliance, Chinese Historical Society of America, Museum of Chinese in the Americas (NYC), National Japanese American Historical Society, San Francisco State University-Asian American Studies Department, Jewish & Polish Genealogical Society, Chinese Canadian Historical Society,

independent historians, genealogists, researchers, journalists, filmmakers, and many others.

According to Jennie Lew, "CHSA has been involved since 1998 when NARA first threatened to close some of the Regional NARA facilities as part of an effort to 'consolidate.' It was Lorraine Dong, Chair of the CHSA Board at the time, that moved its monthly board meeting to San Bruno to make sure everyone was able to speak at a public hearing. That evening was the 'birth' of SONA." ❧

Save the Date!



Voice & Vision Gala 2009

Saturday, September 12, 6 pm

InterContinental Mark Hopkins Hotel, 1 Nob Hill, San Francisco

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 judy@chsa.org.

Writer & Editor: Judy Hu || Design: Elaine Joe



CHINESE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF AMERICA

965 CLAY STREET

SAN FRANCISCO

CALIFORNIA 94108

415 391-1188 TEL

415 391-1150 FAX

[INFO@CHSA.ORG](mailto:info@chsa.org) EMAIL

[WWW.CHSA.ORG](http://www.chsa.org) WEBSITE

TIME DATED MATERIAL

Nonprofit Org.

U.S. Postage

PAID

Permit No. 9103

San Francisco, CA