



Newsletter

MISSISSIPPI DELTA CHINESE HERITAGE MUSEUM, INC.

From the Editor

In this issue we are focused on chronicling articles relating to the two principal individuals who were inspired in bringing MDCHM to fruition. Raymond D. Wong, through a one on one interview with me, and John Paul Quon being honored by Delta State University as told by his wife Frieda, were the two who spearheaded the Chinese Museum project. Although the idea was perceived several years before 2012, the official year that the museum was created, the successful birth and continual growth are evident as supported by its members and the dedication of its archivist, Emily Jones and her associates. Thanks to our members and individuals who have supported us from the beginning.

Harry D. Gong



From the desk of the President

Christmas greetings from the Mississippi Delta as a bone chilling Arctic blast sweeps across the country. Long underwear is the clothing of choice as we experience single degree temperatures the next few days. What a furious close to a very interesting weather year. The Mississippi Delta has always been a place economically depending on the farmers and their crops of cotton, soybeans, and rice. Of course, the farmer's success depends on the weather patterns of the year. Rain, temperature, sun, and winds bring fortune or disaster. Too dry, too wet, too hot, or too cold will determine the successes or failures of the year. Certainly, we need to learn the realities of life and move forward.

The American Steamboat Company learned this summer that they needed the Mississippi River to be flowing deep enough to allow their tour boats to sail. They halted passage because of low river levels, so we didn't have MDCHM visitors for a period of time. Steamboat travel resumed in late fall and we were pleased to again welcome visitors from afar. One of the most curious times was when a Caucasian lady spoke fluent Cantonese to our Asian docent who answered in English (with a Southern accent). We are thankful for our volunteers who make these visits informative and fun for all involved. Tours will resume this Spring.

Next month we will host a delegation from MOCA (Museum of Chinese Americans). They will visit and review our collections to see if there is a suitable artifact(s) from MDCHM to display in the upcoming spectacular new MOCA museum in New York. They will also be conducting oral history interviews while in the Delta for use in their archives.

We have several plans this coming year to make a few renovations and updates to the exhibits and displays, as well the physical museum. We will be utilizing the availability of our intern/curator to add and enhance the appearances of our historical, multifaceted pieces for our visitors. We're proud to be sharing a new brochure to share about MDCHM. It will be placed in strategic places around the Delta to publicize the museum and to help inform the public about the museum's availability. We also have a new guide to help people in navigating the museum during self-guided sessions. Thanks to our intern Ashley Jenkins for her efforts in creating them.

This coming year we will continue our "Where Are They Now" series featuring Margaret Chow Starner, celebrating her success as a prominent Financial Planner. More details to follow soon. The Legacy Wall will be updated to note the generosity of so many, remembering, paying tribute, memorializing, and/or honoring the legacy and lives of Delta folks. We are grateful to each who help our work with their contributions - Thank You!



Another year approaches with a re-elected board and re-elected slate of officers. We appreciate the vote of confidence in the on-going works of the MDCHM to uphold and foster its mission.

Gilroy Chow

News FROM THE ARCHIVES

American Queen

The American Queen Voyages started strong this fall semester, but with the river, at record lows, they began to cancel the boat tours. There were fifteen scheduled for this fall but only five boats were able to dock in Terrene Landing. We enjoyed the guests who came to the museum. We have met people from all over the world, including most recently, a couple from the Netherlands who were interested in Delta life and the Chinese stories. This semester was different in many ways other than the river being low. The guests seem to be more engaging and wanted to learn more about Delta Chinese. They asked questions and wanted further readings. If you do have an opportunity to volunteer during a boat day, please come and tell your story. We look forward to the river boats next semester which will come back in full force in March 2023.



Brochures and Gallery guides

We have a new brochure and gallery guide. I have created a new and improved brochure that connects the guests with the story and history of the Delta Chinese. The colorful brochure has basic information about the museum and how to get involved. I put two QR codes on the back that directed the guests to the Facebook page as well as the Mississippi Delta Chinese Heritage website. This brochure is a good souvenir that guests can take away and share with others. I plan to mail them to different tourist locations such as visitor centers, local museums, hotels, and businesses. I also created the gallery guide for guests inside the museum. This guide helps the museum to be more self-guided for guests to enjoy, since at times, a volunteer is not available to direct people through the exhibits. This guide will aid in their understanding of the museum. I ordered 1,000 brochures and 250 gallery guides. If you have any suggestions of where they should be sent or if you would like some, please let me know.

Chinese New Year 2023

Chinese New Year 2023 is quickly approaching. The New Year is January 22, 2023, which is the year of the water rabbit. If you are the year of the rabbit, we would love for you to attend. The Chinese New Year celebration will be held in the Delta State Archives on January 23, 2023. The museum has partnered with the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion organization on campus to host the celebration again this year. This will be the second year that we have held the Chinese New Year celebrations in the archives, and activities similar to last year are planned. We also partnered with Panda Express for resources such as activity booklets. We are reaching out again to the Delta State Child Development Center and local homeschool and school groups. We hope to have a great turnout like last year. The celebration will be open to the campus as well as the public and ask those who would like to attend to reserve a time slot. Please come and join the festivities and tell your Chinese New Year celebration stories.

Ashley Jenkins

10 Years Since MDCHM Founding

Early spring of 2022 I was informed of this being the tenth year since the official founding of our Heritage Museum. It seemed just yesterday that a group of us met at the Roberts-LaForge Library on the university campus. I felt it appropriate and timely that I convey to you a little history on how the museum project originated from just an idea to the success it is today.

I had the opportunity to sit with Raymond Wong, one of the principals who engineered the museum project, at his home in Greenville during the summer of 2022. From a seventeen



minute interview, I was able to piece together his recollection of how an idea was transformed to a proud reality. The following are the words of recollection that I interpreted from my conversation with Raymond.

“The idea of a museum originated from a social meeting in Jackson around 1995 held by the The Mississippi Department of Archives and History that I did not attend. Two individuals from Greenville, Audrey Sidney and banker Chuck Jordan, attended. Mr. Jordan, a dedicated leader in community involvement, was intrigued that a Jewish Museum existed in Utica, Mississippi. His idea that the Mississippi Delta held such a vast diversity of ethnic people, especially of generations of Chinese families, why not propose a museum project centered about the Chinese in Greenville?”

“Jordan first asked Audrey Sidney if she would engage in heading this museum project, but due to her heavy workload as headmaster of Washington School, she declined. This led to his reaching out to me, so I didn’t reject the idea, but allowed it to marinate in my head.”

“Eventually, I was afforded the opportunity to travel to Washington, D.C., to speak with two of our Mississippi congressmen, Trent Lott and Thad Cochran. Both senators, along with one of the founders of Delta Pine, thought of the project as commendable and very do able. There was also an occasion where I met with the organizer of the Chinese American museum in New York, to avail myself of his ideas when structuring the museum there.”

“I contacted John Paul Quon, from Moorhead and a professor at Delta State University, who volunteered his thoughts and ideas. With his involvement our nucleus was formed, and the next step was recruiting individuals who shared our vision. We assembled some interested parties and presented the ideas informally at my How Joy Restaurant.”

“However, in 2004 an unfortunate personal medical event presented a postponement towards our efforts to continue. I had a major stroke and it was questionable whether I would survive. Also, the untimely passing of John Paul Quon in September of 2006 presented another setback in continuing with the museum project.”

“By the grace of God, I did awaken and recover, but with issues of frailty and minor inadequacies. It was interesting that when I awakened, one of the first thoughts that entered my mind was with regards to the museum.”

“My recovery was long and arduous, but when my strength and mental focus sharpened, I tried my best to resume the normalcy of my life as best I could. Months and years passed before I could really refocus on anything to do with the museum. Eventually as my endurance and stamina improved, I reestablished my objective towards the museum project by visiting with then mayor of Greenville, Heather McTeer. Nothing materialized from that visit other than she thought the idea was very intriguing. I then proceeded to resume my personal project of interviewing individuals of interest in the Delta community.”

“One day I called to interview Emily Jones, the archivist at Delta State University, with the video to be aired on WABG. We spoke of her duties and responsibilities to the archives there. After the interview, I presented to her my thoughts towards establishing a Chinese Heritage museum in Greenville, seeking any recommendations. We then commenced to exchange our ideas. The following day Emily called me back and asked, “What about not having the museum in Greenville, but in Cleveland instead? I just spoke with Mayor Billy Nowell and he was very interested.” She drove to Greenville to pick me up and upon arriving in Cleveland, Emily and I had audience with the mayor of Cleveland. It was then at that meeting, the story of our museum was given birth. This was the marriage of the history of the Chinese people, Delta State University, and the City of Cleveland. From an idea to a foundation, this was the spark that moved us towards the preservation of our unique culture and history that I envisioned”

In the year 2012 the Mississippi Delta Chinese Heritage Museum became official. On October 21, 2012, the Historical Marker of the Chinese Mission School in Cleveland was unveiled, and a ribbon

cutting ceremony on the steps of the Charles Capps, Jr. Archives and Museum Building finalized the celebration. On that date many former residents of Chinese heritage returned to their roots in the Delta in order to pay homage towards the preservation of their history and culture. Although it was a long and arduous path that took years to nurture to reality, we take great pride with this museum as it voices to all that visit, “We were indeed a significant part in consecrating our place in Mississippi history”.

Harry Don Gong

John Paul Quon Tribute

John Paul Quon (1942-2006) is remembered for two things he valued dearly -- teaching Accounting and documenting the story of the Mississippi Delta Chinese. He would be humbled and extremely proud for the recognition. A lifelong resident of Moorhead, the youngest of five children (one brother and three sisters) he was the only one born in the U.S. He worked alongside his parents in their family grocery store. At the age of five he stood on a wooden soda crate so he could reach the counter to sell candy, cookies and soda. One Saturday he collected a hundred dollars (that’s when the costs for these items were 5 cents or 1 cent)! Lessons he learned growing up in the store would influence him throughout his life.



For more than 35 years John Quon taught and mentored Accountancy students at DSU. Delta State University’s Accountancy Program is now renamed *John Yurkow, Jr. and John P. Quon Accountancy Program* for their contributions and continuous support to DSU students preparing to enter the field of accounting. John became Chair of Accountancy, Computer Information Systems and Finance and was appointed by the Governor to serve a five-year term on the Mississippi State Board of Public Accountancy. He appreciated the honors but his greatest joy was in the classroom. Students would learn that to be in his class they were expected to do their best (completing assignments and attending classes). He took pride in the success of his students who were well prepared for the work world.

John valued Chinese culture; early on he recognized the unique story of the Chinese in the Mississippi Delta and was keenly aware that unless it was documented, it would be lost. With the younger generation leaving and the older ones dying or moving to be with their children, it was critical to act soon. He sought ways to preserve our history.

In the 90s John and others interested in preserving the Chinese presence in the Delta formed the **Delta American-Chinese Heritage** organization. When plans to establish the Chinese Museum in Greenville failed, then later, Cleveland became an option.

In 2000 John was Consultant for the **Chinese Oral History Project** funded by the Mississippi Humanities Council to gather individual stories of 15 multi-generational Chinese families, these oral histories are available from Capps Archives. These initial interviews provided the nucleus for the beginning of the Mississippi Delta Chinese Heritage Museum and have been the inspiration for books, plays and even dance performances.

Several factors made Cleveland a favorable choice for MDCHM. City of Cleveland Mayor Billy Nowell endorsed the plan, DSU allowed space in the Archives to house the Chinese Museum, Emily Jones, University Archivist, was available to be curator, and there was a group of local Board members who came together to work toward this goal. Unfortunately John did not live to see these plans come to fruition. He would be amazed with the Chinese Museum at DSU and the significant impact it has made.

Frieda Quon

An Amazing 3-day Smithsonian/Bishop Museum Workshop for MDCHM



The MDCHM was invited to participate in a wonderful and informative workshop in LA this past September. These groups from Washington, DC and Honolulu, HI hosted a distinguished group of scholars, curators, educators and leaders to hear and learn of ways and methods of stewarding, preserving and sharing the history and culture of Asian American and Pacific Islander communities. We were honored to have received this invitation and were happy to share our Mississippi Delta story in this venue. Over 20 institutions and more than 50 participants with 30 speakers over 3 long days engaged in collaborating and exchanging methodologies and in techniques for collecting, accessing and interpreting the relationships in the many diverse communities.

This was the first in-person meeting for the Smithsonian Asian Pacific American Center and the Smithsonian center for Folklife and Cultural Center post COVID. It was held in LA to be central to the large group from the historic Bishop Museum in Hawaii and the rest of the country. The credentials for this gathering filled many pages of inspiring biographies, representing the diverse multicultural institutions, large and small. It was an impressive venue to share the inspirational role of Mississippi Delta Chinese in growing their communities and families in a sometimes, hostile environment. It was a strong reminder that we have an obligation to save and share the lessons learned those many years ago into our current environment.

Our specific session was titled *"Stewarding Relationships and Communities in Context of Place."* It consisted of a moderator and 4 panelists, each sharing their perspectives of their unique and diverse places across this expansive land of ours. There was a meaningful exchange of the Filipino community (Stockton, CA), Indigenous Hawaiian peoples (He'eia, HI), Seattle, WA, and MS Delta Chinese. This was a great opportunity of learning and sharing approaches to community integration and growing a broad network of museums and other cultural and historical organizations. We will be in further touch to utilize these contacts to further the work of MDCHM in the years to come. What a special opportunity to create working relationships. We're thankful to these national treasures to recognize the work that's being done here in Mississippi. I must commend our own board for their continuing efforts to promote our heritage.

Gilroy Chow

Acknowledgement and appreciation to Ashley Jenkins for her contribution in producing and getting this issue of the MDCHM Newsletter out to you. Thank you so much, Ashley.

Raymond & Harry