

The Voice of Asian America

AsianWeek

September 25 – October 1, 2003 • Volume 25 No. 05

www.asianweek.com

GO TO SCHOOL

SF Unified cracks down on truancy

JESSICA HAGEDORN

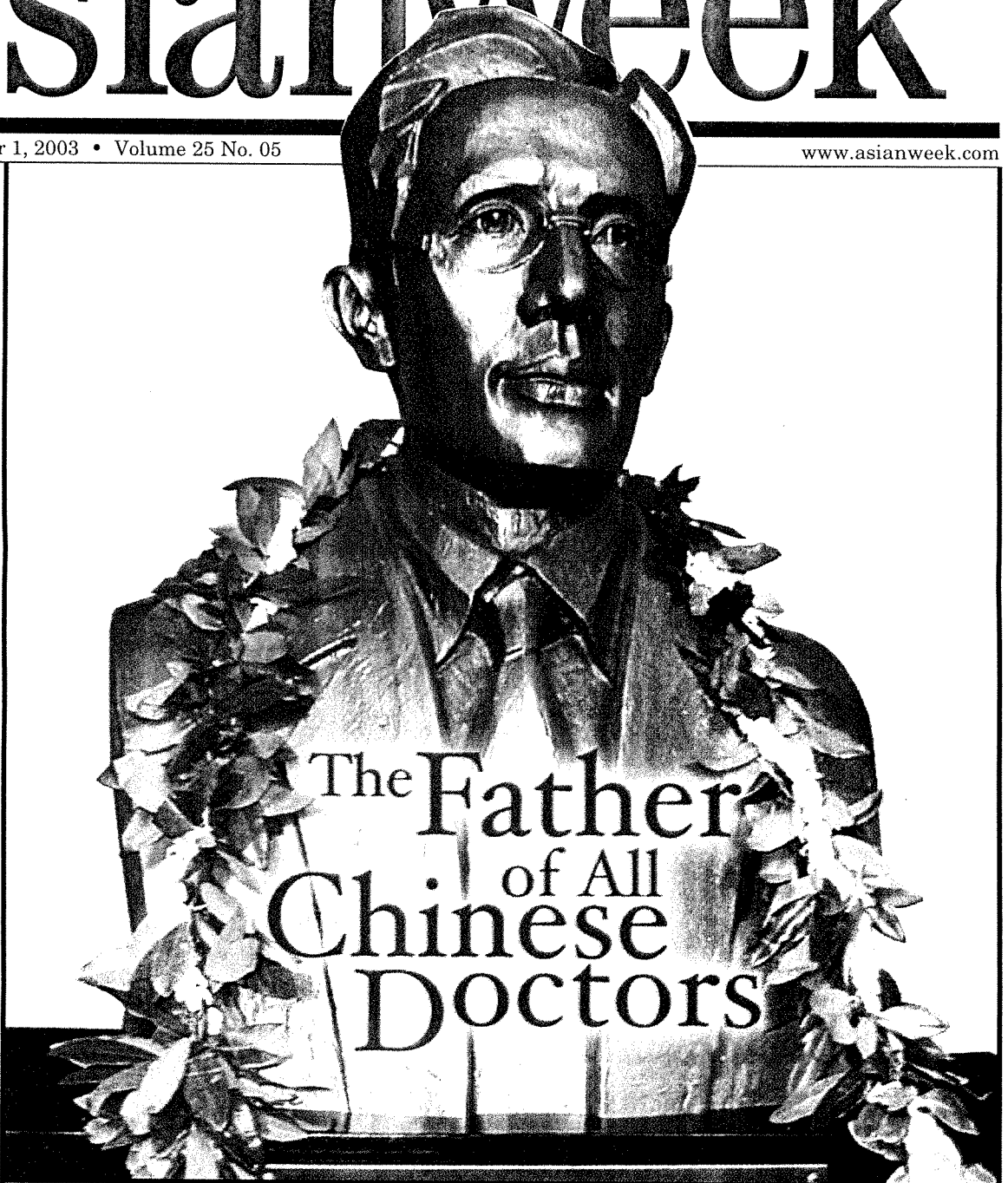
After 'Dogeaters' comes 'Dream Jungle'

EMIL AMOK

Time for Kobe to claim lynching

CLUCK CLUCK CLUCK!

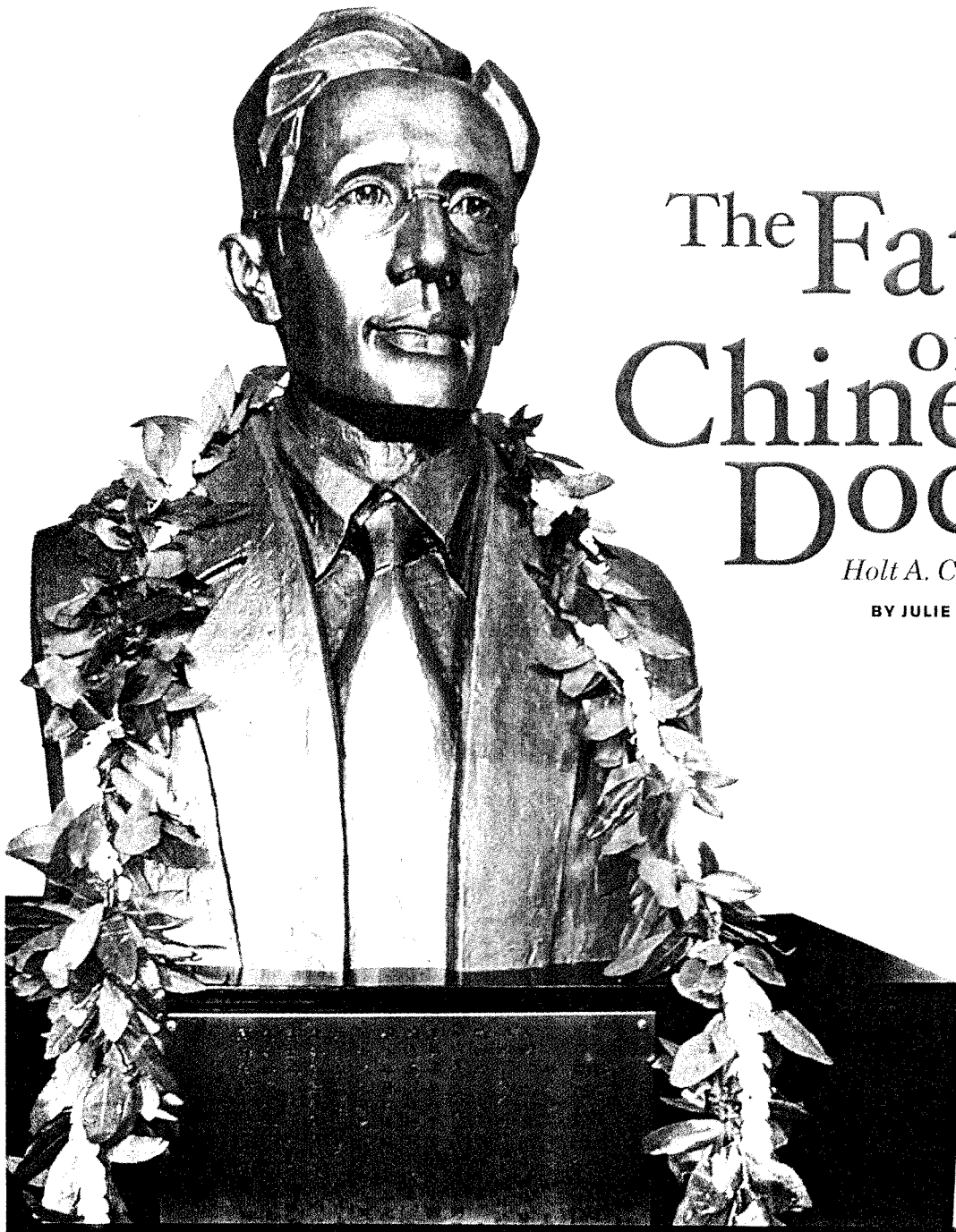
Picky Eater honors National Chicken Month



OOH-RAH!
Plaque becomes rallying point



DIMPLED CHAD
Court recalls the recall election



The Father of All Chinese Doctors

Holt A. Cheng was a trailblazer

BY JULIE SOO | *Special to AsianWeek*

Recognition came nearly a century after **Holt A. Cheng** graduated from the College of Physicians and Surgeons in San Francisco in 1904 and handily passed the California Medical Board examination to become the first Chinese American licensed physician in California.

Surrounded by three generations of Chengs at a formal San Francisco Medical Society ceremony on July 26, Dr. Homer Cheng, Holt's 76-year-old son, said tears came to his eyes when he received a copy of a November 2002 letter.

The correspondence from Dr. Robert Lull, then president of the 135-year-old San Francisco Medical Society, written to Dean Ling of Guang Hua College (part of the medical school Holt Cheng founded) announced that the San Francisco Medical Society would honor Cheng. Even though he never practiced as a doctor in San Francisco, he would retroactively become a member of the society.

"This has to be the greatest honor my father could receive in the United States," says Homer Cheng. "Although he may not have accomplished all he set out to do in his

relatively short life, I believe he accomplished quite a bit. In fact, I am sure my father is smiling down on us today, here in San Francisco as well as the Guang Hua campus in Guangzhou, China."

'Enterprising Chinaman' with No Queue

Dr. Holt Cheng first made news headlines on Aug. 8, 1904, in *The San Francisco Call* newspaper. Although his picture was prominent, the compliments were backhanded and even his name was butchered. The newspaper described "Chang A. Holt" of 804 Stockton St. as an "enterprising Chinaman" who "enjoys the distinction of being the first Chinaman admitted to practice by the Board of Medical Examiners of California. ... He has been Christianized and wears no queue."

The article told of Cheng's journey as an

8-year-old sent to the Hawaiian Islands in 1886 to work for an uncle, who was a grocer in Hilo, and his subsequent desire to become a medical doctor: "With much money in his pocket, the slant-eyed boy then sailed to America. He commenced upon his studies immediately and applied himself as busily as ever to the fulfillment of his purpose."

Cheng indicated his desire to bring his Western medical training to the people of his birthplace in Guangdong Province. *The San Francisco Call* wrote: "He will cure their bodies of physical ills, teach them the advantages of civilization and instruct them spiritually."

Upon his return to China, Cheng was invited to the Imperial Palace in Peking and was awarded the special degree of Medical Ju Ren, the fourth highest scholarly degree given by the palace. He was appointed as

the expectant secretary of the Grand Secretariat and head master of the Imperial Army Medical College in Canton. In June 1909, Cheng represented the Imperial Chinese government at the International Leprosy Conference in Bergen, Norway.

Marriage on the Front Page

Nearly six years after his California medical induction, Cheng again made Bay Area news headlines. On the front page of the March 23, 1910, *Oakland Tribune*, it announced Cheng and Edna Lee as a "prominent Chinese couple who will be married March 29th in the First Baptist Church, according to American customs."

This time, the coverage was more accepting, even if a cartooned character of Cupid

Cheng continued on page 14

Untangling Chinese Family Roots

Genealogist offers some tips

BY JULIE D. SOO
Special to AsianWeek

Jeanie Low, a San Francisco-based genealogist and lecturer for the National Genealogical Society, specializes in Chinese American history and offers tips on how to begin a search for family history. Additional help can be gleaned from her book *China Connections: Finding Ancestral Roots for Chinese in America*. Much of Chinese American history for families whose ancestors came through San Francisco, particularly during the Chinese Exclusion Act era (1882-1943) and earlier, and up to pre-1965 immigration, is housed at the U.S. National Archives & Records Administration (NARA), Pacific Sierra Region offices in San Bruno, Calif.

- Talk to relatives. If the first-generation immigrant entered before 1965, find out what port that ancestor entered, the name at entry and the year. If the person left and returned to the United States, find out the latest year of entry.

- If the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) investigated the subject person sometime between the '50s and the '70s concerning resident status, naturalization or confession and amnesty, an Alien File, or "A-File," was created. These documents are not open to the public and a Freedom of Information Act records request must be made to the INS (now the Department of Justice's Department of Homeland Security, Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services). Be able to provide the naturalized name or any other name used, the port of entry and the naturalization year.

If the subject person is still alive, that person must execute a notarized document giving the researcher permission to access the documents. If the subject person is deceased, a copy of the death certificate or signature of the executor giving permission to access the documents is required.

The U.S. government began keeping A-Files in 1944 under the authority of the Alien Registration Act of 1940.

- If the subject person entered the United States before 1965 and was not investigated, the immigration documents are most likely at

NARA and can be located through a name index database.

Researchers may call ahead and make an appointment with NARA staff. The staff may conduct a search, pull files and have documents available prior to arrival at the NARA offices.

- As with the Holt A. Cheng case, variations of his name have come into play. If a name does not appear, try flipping the name around. (Many Chinese surnames were mistakenly documented as first names and many given names were used as last names by immigration officials.) Try variations in spelling. Also keep in mind the "paper sons" issue: After records were destroyed in the San Francisco earthquake and fire in '06, many Chinese used false documents and adopted a U.S. "sponsor's" surname to immigrate under the guise of being a son, a "paper son" or son in name only. Talking to relatives will reveal whether the current surname is the original family name or a "paper name." The Chinese character surname is usually the true family name. Many families with paper names revert back to the true family name upon naturalization.

Often, a search at NARA returns a number of people by the same name. Have other identifying information available, such as other individuals who may have immigrated at the same time or photos of the subject person at the age of entry. Researchers may want to copy photos from NARA to show relatives for positive identification.

- Other places to search include:
 - U.S. census records from 1790-1930. Note that the 1890 census records were lost in a fire.
 - Look to individual Chinese communities. Many family and benevolent associations and the community-at-large keep records.
 - If the subject person came through San Francisco from 1892 to the 1930s, look to the Chinese Business Partnership registry. Immigrants during those years were required to register with the INS through this registry so that the INS could enforce the Chinese Exclusion Act, albeit with rather loose criteria: "working with hands" meant a laborer subject to the act as compared to a "business partner."
 - If the subject person died between 1870 and 1933 in California, the INS compiled a list to compare with any entering immigrants allegedly using false identification. Low adds that placing family history within the larger historical context will aid in successful searches.

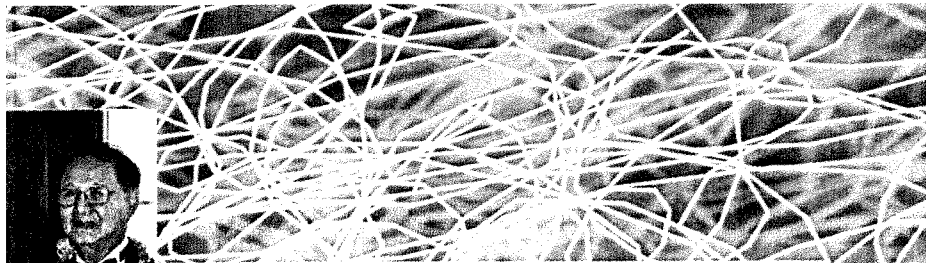


PHOTO BY JULIE SOO
his son, Rex Lee Cheng that sits at a table

of Holt Cheng, the story eluded him

d looked under his "Cheng" or "Chang" clothing. Then, he began to search after a letter by Helen Zia, a Chinese author and anniversary dinner of the Chinese Citizens Association. Zia spoke of children and other APAs as "MIH."

dinner in the San Francisco community that Homer recalls. Overwhelmed after being there are no Chinese they all were."

, CHSA board member Homer at that time joined his search but

the body will be at 18/04 mtg. 25

, I called this history story. As I learned I was surprised, denied angry. I learned I had never known before, my heritage, my things that every know, yet so few people

Los Angeles physician appreciates what his quest means for his two sisters, also

doctors.
"I didn't know a lot about my grandfather because my father didn't know; he only had bits and pieces of information," Rex Lee Cheng says. "My father is thinking of going back to China one more time for the 95th anniversary of the Guang Hua Medical College."

Reflecting on his grandfather's life and his parents' life as immigrants from China, he says, "When you look back and try to put yourself in their shoes, what stands out are their survival skills. Their choices were not always appealing but were necessary to achieve their ultimate goals."

Dr. Cheng and Sausage

Joyce Chan and Homer Cheng continue to search for more clues in the Holt Cheng story.

"My friends think this new hobby has become an addiction," says Chan. Indeed, less than two weeks after the San Francisco Medical Society event, she left for Honolulu to do more research. Her latest findings from the Hawaii State Archives include documents showing A. Chang Ho arrived on the *Oceanic* on July 17, 1893, at age 14, disputing *The San Francisco Call* article stating that Holt arrived in Hilo at age 8. C.A. Holt filed for an application for merchandise and tobacco, cigars and cigarettes on May 9, 1898, allowing him to be a successful grocer. C.A. Holt paid \$17.75 in taxes, according to the Tax Assessment and Collection Ledger, 224-4-1899, Vol. 2, page 59. Ah Holt C. was a Chinese interpreter for the Hilo law firm of

Wilder, Wise and Wakefield in Husted's Directory of Honolulu, 1899. A book evidences Chang Ho as part of Sun Yat Sen's Chinese Revolutionary Team in Hilo in 1903.

Chan chuckles, "We can thank Holt Cheng for having *lop cheung* (Chinese sausage)." One of the San Francisco Chinese-language newspapers dated March 15, 1910, notes that at a Chinese Chamber of Commerce banquet, "President Tan expressed gratitude to Dr. Cheng, who persuaded the U.S. government to repeal the ban on Chinese sausage import. He signed a document to prove that Chinese sausage was not harmful to one's health."

"It is so exciting each time I make a discovery so I can connect one [more] piece of the puzzle with a new finding," Chan says. "One of the Guang Hua alumni wrote in a letter, 'You have brought glory to the Chinese people across two continents.' What more could I ask?"

